

THE CRUCIAL ISSUE OF EATING BLOOD AND STRANGLED MEAT FROM THE
DECREE OF THE COUNCIL OF JERUSALEM IN ACTS 15: 20

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE DIVISION OF BIBLICAL STUDIES
GORDON-CONWELL THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
SOUTH HAMILTON, MASSACHUSETTS

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR DEGREE
MASTER OF THEOLOGY IN BIBLICAL STUDIES

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APRIL, 2015

ABSTRACT

This study of the issue of the prohibition of eating blood and strangled meat in Acts 15:20, the Apostolic Decree, is to contribute a clearer picture of the determination that James made at the Jerusalem Council. In the study of its original language, the context, and the historical background, we find that James' determination was the exposition of the prophecy of Amos 9:11-12, which foretells Gentiles joining Jews to be God's people. The fourfold prohibition in Acts 15:20 is not a theological issue concerning Gentile Christian's salvation, but it is a minimal petition for Gentiles who live in a Jewish culture, which is explained in Leviticus 17-18.

The study shows that the passage portrays the official recognition of the gospel for Gentiles, and the fourfold prohibition of the Apostolic Decree relates to the preparation of establishing a harmonious fellowship between Jewish and Gentile Christians. This is an important text for mission and pastoral ministry in this multi-cultural society, and this is a very helpful study to help Chinese Christians who are confused by the teaching of impermissible and permissible views of "eating blood" and "strangled meat."

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

My special appreciation to my thesis supervisor, Dr. Aída Besançon Spencer, for her encouragement and wisdom to guide me personally throughout the process of writing this thesis. Also, I want to show my appreciation to Dr. Eckhard J. Schnabel, for his willingness to consult with me before I started writing it, and to Dr. Sean McDonough, who generously served as the second reader for my thesis out of his very busy schedule. Moreover, my thanks go to Maud Sandbo, my sister in Christ who I have not met personally, for her help editing my thesis.

I want to take this opportunity to thank the Board of China Reformed Theological Seminary (CRTS), for its decision for letting me have an earlier sabbatical leave for my advanced training at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. Also, my gratitude must go to all the staff of CRTS and its faculty who supported my family with prayers; they bore much of my responsibility while I was away.

Last but not least, my deepest gratitude and debt goes to my beloved wife, Ju-Ping C. Yeo, who has been my other half for twenty five years; she has been my best and faithful helper, supporter, encourager, critic, and friend since then. Throughout this year (summer 2013 to summer 2014), she supported my study and bore extra burdens of the family for me. To our children Zephaniah, Anna, and Praisye, I want to thank them for their understanding of their father's absence in order to stay in the library. Most of all, my thanksgiving must go to the Triune God for the accomplishment of this project. Soli Deo Gloria.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND LITERARY STUDY

Introduction

A. Background of the Study

The issues of “eating blood” and “eating strangled meat” appear to be rather unessential, for they seem to refer to a religious rule for diet. For most people, these issues will never be their concern or might never pertain to them throughout their whole lives. The related issue, “eating the food sacrificed to idols,” is quite foreign to most American and European Christians, for they do not live in countries where they are surrounded by pagan temples, idols, and idol foods. However, to those who live in Asia, these issues are part of their daily lives. In some places, temples and shrines are located on almost every single block of the street. Christopher Hall explains: “Shrines to Tudi Gong can be found in many retail establishments, markets, and restaurants throughout Taiwan. These displays may be small shelves in back corners of small, one-room shops; or they may be larger shrines in alcoves.”¹

Before Christianity influenced the world, people on every continent worshipped pagan gods, except the people of Israel. Due to the religious background of those days, the early church and Christians had to face many issues related to pagan worship, and the issues of “eating blood” and “eating strangled meat” were unavoidable during the first century. No matter whether Christians liked to touch on these issues or not, they had to

¹ Christopher A. Hall, “Tudi Gong in Taiwan” in *Southeast Review of Asian Studies* 31 (2009), 97–112; “Tudi Gong” means “Earth God” in Chinese.

deal with them. Today in the Orient, especially in China and Taiwan, whether or not we would like to touch on these issues, we cannot choose to avoid them. Unfortunately, controversies over these matters have caused some churches to split, and some Christians to become enemies.

B. Statement of Problem

In the Oriental Christian community, these issues of “eating blood” and “strangled meat” have received a lot of attention because different interpretations regarding the controversy have caused much confusion. One faction sees that God’s command to humans not to eat blood or meat that contained blood was meant for believers both in the Old Testament and the New Testament,² yet the other group, which includes Stephen C.T. Chen, believes that these four prohibitions should not apply to contemporary Christians, for the decree was to help to establish a relational bridge between Jewish Christian and Gentile believers.³ Ironically, we have seen some churches and “godly” followers of Christ endeavoring to be faithful to their interpretations of the truth, yet being led to separate from each other due to their different positions on this matter. The truth is meant to build up God’s house, not to separate it. Supposedly, the truth is to lead us to know and love God and others. We know the Scripture should not make us confused, and its teaching, instead, should build up Christ’s body. Therefore, these biblical issues should not be something that damages the relationship among the parts of the body; God purposely puts issues of “eating blood” and “strangled meat” here to help build us up. We

² Watchman Nee, *Christian Discipleship (III)* 初信造就 (Taipei: Taiwan Gospel Bookstore, 1990), 56.

³ Stephen C.T. Chen 陳終道, *To the Ends of the Earth: Commentary of Acts* (Hong Kong: China Alliance Press, 1998), 247.

have to admit that the main cause of the confusion is not the Bible or its author, but the limitation or inadequacy of our knowledge of God and His word.

Because existing interpretations on the issues of “eating the strangled meat” and “eating blood” from different scholars provide contradictory advice to their readers, surely these interpretations have confused many as well. Actually, misunderstandings about what the Bible teaches will be likely to mislead believers, especially since many think that Paul holds different perspectives even in his own letters. For Paul comments, “we are neither the worse if we do not eat, nor the better if we do eat” (1 Cor. 8:8 NASB) and “All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful, but not all things edify” (10:23 NASB). However, James warns them to abstain from “idol food,” “strangled meat,” and “blood.” In response to these problems of different views and questions regarding Paul’s view, we will attempt to find a reasonable interpretation that provides practical value, and, through this study, we hope we will help churches and Christians that have been affected by these issues.

C. Purpose of Study

The purpose for conducting this study is to do an exegesis of Acts 15:20 based on the grammatical-historical approach. Besides going back to the original Greek language of the text, we will study these issues based on the historical Greco-Roman and Jewish backgrounds. The main goal of the study is not only to search for a better interpretation, but to find a better way to apply what we learn from this study within the Church of Jesus Christ.

The Literary Review

In this section, we will review the study of the issues of “strangled meat” and “eating blood” in the Jerusalem council from different perspectives. Since this is not an easy topic, we need to rely on our investigations in literature from the early church until today. First, we will study what scholars throughout church history have meant by these two issues; second, we will investigate contemporary scholars’ positions on these two issues.

A. Text and Definitions

The question of the prohibition of eating blood and strangled meat was raised in the decree of the Council of Jerusalem. When Gentiles began to be converted to Christianity, some Jewish Christians came to Paul and Barnabas and required that Gentile believers be circumcised in order to be saved (Acts 15:1). Paul and Barnabas debated with them, and this event led them to go to Jerusalem to seek an answer from the leadership of the Jerusalem church. After long debates and testimonies, the Council made its judgment, with James’ leadership, and issued a decree for the Gentile believers. James concluded, “Therefore, I am determining not to trouble the Gentiles when they convert to God, but to write them in order to abstain from (things) of defilement of idols, and the fornication, and the strangled meat, and the blood” (15:20).⁴ The same matters were mentioned again in the same context when the letter to the Gentile churches was written, but in a different order. The letter concludes, “that you abstain from things sacrificed to idols, blood, things strangled, and from fornication; if you keep yourselves free from such

⁴ The translation is mine. For detail see Appendix 2.

things, you will do well. Goodbye” (Acts 15:29).⁵ The third appearance of the same content may be found at the end of Paul’s third missionary journey. He ended his trip with a visit to Jerusalem. While in Jerusalem, Paul went to visit James and all the leaders of the Jerusalem church. They brought out again the issue about the letter of the council which warned about abstinence from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality (Acts 21:25). Luke records James’ conclusion three times in Acts, and thus it should be worthwhile for us to study it carefully.

Our study will begin with defining the prohibitions against eating strangled meat and blood. Some believe that these two prohibitions are actually one issue. Let us see what scholars say about this matter.

1. *What Does Abstaining from the Strangled Meat Mean?*

Avram Yehoshua⁶ defines “strangled meat” as meat that contains blood in it for the blood has to be totally drained, and he comments, “It is true that Yahveh did not want His people Israel to eat [meat] with blood in it (Lev 19:26; Ezek 24:1-24). To allow the blood to remain within the animal corrupts the meat by its very presence as many toxins or poisons are carried by the blood and remain in the meat if it is not properly drained.”⁷ He also states that it is common knowledge to remove the blood before eating it, and therefore this must not be what James means in the decree of the council.⁸ Also, it is neither about Jewish dietary regulations nor table fellowship. He says the prohibition is

⁵ The translation is mine. See Appendix 2.

⁶ Avram Yehoshua is a Jewish Christian leader. He founded the first Hebraic congregation, The Seed of Abraham, in Tulsa, Oklahoma. He and his wife are now ministers in Israel.

⁷ Avram Yehoshua, *The Lifting of the Veil: Acts 15:20-21* (Bloomington: Trafford, 2011), 142.

⁸ Ibid. 142.

not to oppose eating meat with blood in it, but it is related to idolatry practices where an animal is strangled.⁹

Does the word πνικτός mean the animal was slaughtered improperly? R.J. Knowling defines the word “strangled” as “the animals had been killed through strangling where blood had not been let out when they were killed.”¹⁰ He comments that Moses teaches directly about the prohibition against strangling animals, yet eating meat with blood or that has been strangled would offend Jewish culture, for it is prohibited according to Leviticus 17:13, Deuteronomy 12:16 and 23.¹¹

Howard Marshall believes “the strangled meat” is meat that has blood remaining in it, and is related to the food regulations referred to in Leviticus 17.¹² Wycliffe defines it as “meat from which the blood had not been properly removed. Such meat was considered a delicacy by many pagans.”¹³ Here, we have another definition of the word; it is a kind of delicacy for pagans in the first century period. Ben Witherington believes that it is related to sacrificial idolatry; James’ teaching was to stop the practice of presenting animals for sacrifice to idols by strangling them.¹⁴ Origen comments, “The Bible forbids things strangled because the blood has not been removed, which, they say, is the food of daemons who nourished by the vapours rising from it, in order that we may not be fed on daemons’ food, perhaps because if we were to partake of things strangled

⁹ Ibid. 146.

¹⁰ R.J. Knowling, *The Expositor’s Greek Testament: The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 324.

¹¹ Ibid. 325.

¹² I. Howard Marshall, *Acts* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2008), 253.

¹³ Everett F. Harrison, ed. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1990), 1152.

¹⁴ Ben Witherington III, *Acts- Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 464.

some spirits of this nature might be fed together with us.”¹⁵ In other words, the practice of keeping the blood might be for ritual purposes.

Eckhard Schnabel gives another definition of the word “strangled meat”: it means “what has been smothered.”¹⁶ Smothered meat is the tender meat from very young animals, and Schnabel believes the word is related to infanticide or abortion in ancient societies.¹⁷ We believe the practice of infanticide could be related to religious ritual. Tertullian mentions infanticide was practiced for religious purposes during his time (*Apol.* 9:6). David Instone-Brewer sees the decree as associated with *Sibylline universal law*. If that is the case, strangled meat is related to the practice of infanticide,¹⁸ and James wants to stop this cruel practice among the Gentiles. In summary, most scholars believe that “the strangled meat” is the meat that still contained blood in it, and it is possible that it refers to pagan worship and infanticide.

2. *What Does Abstaining from the Blood Mean?*

What does the blood mean in this decree of the Council of Jerusalem?

From a Jewish Christian perspective, David H. Stern comments that it could be “drinking animals’ blood, or failing to remove it from meat, or figurative, a metaphor for murder.”¹⁹ Actually, most scholars define the blood in this context as falling into all of or one of these three meanings.

¹⁵ Origen, *Contra Celsus*, (ed. and trans. Henry Chadwick; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 473. (Origen *Celsus*, 8.30)

¹⁶ Eckhard Schnabel, *Acts- Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 644.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 643-644.

¹⁸ David Instone-Brewer, “Infanticide and the Apostolic Decree of Acts 15,” *JETS* 52, 2 (June 2009): 310.

¹⁹ David H. Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary* (Clarksville: Jewish New Testament, 1992), 277.

Marshall sees blood in the Decree as blood itself, or blood within the meat, and as a food regulation. He believes that Jewish Christians who were accustomed to Jewish law adhered to the food regulations from Leviticus 17:8-13.²⁰

Wycliffe believes that in the context blood refers to food or diet, and James' proposal of abstaining from the blood is merely to prevent Gentile believers from unintentionally offending their Jewish brothers and sisters:

The blood refers to the pagan custom of using blood as a food. The last two requirements involved the same offense, for the Jew who believed that "the life is in the blood" (Lev 17: 11) regarded the eating of any blood particularly offensive. The decree was issued to the Gentile churches not as means of salvation but as basis for fellowship, in the spirit of Paul's exhortation that those who were strong in faith should be willing to restrict their liberty in such matters rather than offend the weaker brothers.²¹

In Schnabel's view, the word refers to abstinence from "the spilling of blood" (murder), and, quite possibly, means a prohibition from eating blood products.²² Witherington sees the abstinence of blood as related to drinking or tasting blood during the worship of idols in pagan temples, and he believes that the word could mean "murdering."²³

Yehoshua comments, "[James] renders the Christian interpretation of table fellowship impossible. Scholars should have known that the eating of bacon, even 'well done,' next to a Jewish believer, would certainly offend him, as all the Jewish believers continued to keep the Law of Moses (and dietary laws) after the resurrection."²⁴ In summary, the prohibition of "eating blood" refers to a literal drinking of animals' blood

²⁰ Marshall, *Acts*, 243, 253.

²¹ Harrison, *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, 1152.

²² Schnabel, *Acts*, 644.

²³ Witherington, *Acts*, 464. Stern holds the same position, yet he believes that it could also refer to the abstinence from eating meat that had blood in it. Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, 148.

²⁴ Yehoshua, *Lifting of the Veil*, 150.

or blood products, and eating meat that still contained blood from it. It is quite convincing to say the definition of “eating blood” is related to pagan worship.

3. *Are These Two Issues Considered as One?*

Acts 15:20 says, “but to write them in order to abstain from things of defilement of idols, and the fornication, and the strangled meat and the blood.”

Wycliffe and F.F. Bruce see the issues of abstaining from “strangled meat” and “eating blood” as connected, and one issue. Bruce comments that these two abstinences should be the same. The reference to “the strangled meat and the blood” means “eating flesh with blood in it ... was expressly forbidden in Jewish law (Lev 17:10-14), because the life or soul (Heb. *nephesh*) resided in blood. The prohibition goes back to Gen. 9:4.”²⁵

Bruce believes that

At a later time, when the issue dealt with by the apostolic council was no longer a live one, the provisions moved by James and adopted by other leaders were modified so as to become purely ethical injunctions; thus the Western text makes James propose that Gentile converts “abstain from idolatry, from fornication and from bloodshed.”²⁶

Yehoshua comments that “scholars like to connect strangled with the fourth rule, blood, but however logical this may seem, it is not what Yakov [James] meant.”²⁷ He explains that James would have added other regulations regarding permissible kinds of animals in Leviticus 11 if he wanted to be more cautious.²⁸

²⁵ F.F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 300; Knowling, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 325. Knowling holds a similar view, and he comments, “[the blood was] forbidden by Jewish law, Lev. 17:10... [also] nothing could override the command first given to Noah, Gen 9:4, together with the permission to eat animal food, and renewed in the law.”

²⁶ Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, 296.

²⁷ Yehoshua, *Lifting of the Veil*, 143.

²⁸ Ibid.

Cyprian and Tertullian both observe that these two rules fall one right after the other in the list, and we should consider them as the same issue. These two prohibitions are about the abstinence from eating blood and meats containing blood.²⁹

My conclusion is that the prohibitions regarding strangled meat and the blood have two major meanings. First is the rule for the Gentile believers to stop eating blood as food, for it has been offered to idols. In other words, this prohibition against drinking blood is associated with the prohibition against defilement by idols. The second is related to the previous point: to abstain from the meat with blood in it, which is the meat sacrificed to idols.

B. The Historical Investigations of the Issues

The issues of strangled meat and eating blood have been discussed and dealt with by those who were before us, such as the Church Fathers, the Reformers, contemporary scholars, and pastor-teachers.

In order to have a thorough understanding of the issues of the abstinence of “strangled meat” and “blood,” we must engage in historical investigation from the early church to contemporary studies. There are two major arguments about these issues. The impermissible group believes that the decree states clearly not to practice anything that is listed. The other group holds the opposite view; they take the permissible position on the issues of “strangled meat and eating blood” based on Paul’s teaching of Christian liberty and conscience. From generation to generation, we have found supporters for both of these two opposite views.

²⁹ Yehoshua, *Lifting of the Veil*, 149.

1. *Impermissible View*

Some Church Fathers wrote about these two issues. Tertullian comments that “we abstain on that account from things strangled or die of themselves, that we may not in any way be polluted by blood, even if it is buried in the meat” (*Apol.* 9:13). Justin Martyr believes the abstinence of strangled meat and blood are based on Noah’s covenant; he reminds his audience that “Moses makes known to you in the Book of Genesis how God allowed the righteous Noe [Noah] to eat every kind of meat, except the meat with blood of strangled animals” (Justin, *Dial.*20) .

Origen, the Bishop of Alexandria of the third century, teaches that the abstinence from eating blood is given to Israelites and foreigners as well as to Gentile believers. He believes the Gentile church had to accept the law of blood in common with the people of Israel, for this had been written in the Law and ordered and decreed in writing.³⁰ Besides, Origen believes that strangled meat from which blood has not been removed, or “blood” is related to “the food of demons,” and it is reasonable that James commanded not to partake of it (Origen *Celsus* 8.30).

Peter Walpot³¹ comments, “even since the time of Noah until the apostles’ time, it was not fitting for us to drink or eat blood, be it human or animal blood. This the apostles themselves also instructed out of consideration for love; we should therefore hold ourselves to this.”³² J.W. McGarvey³³ comments,

The four things from which James proposed that the Gentiles should be required to abstain had been made unlawful, not by the Mosaic law, but by the revelations

³⁰ Francis Martin, *Ancient Christian Commentary: Acts* (Downer Grove: IVP, 2006), 188.

³¹ Peter Walpot was a Moravian Radical leader in the sixteenth century.

³² Esther Chung-Kim and Todd Hains, eds., *Reformation Commentary on Scripture: Acts* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2013), 212. Also see QGT 12:132.

³³ John William McGarvey (1829 – 1911) was a minister and Christian educator in the American Restoration Movement.

of the patriarchal age. From the beginning it had been known to the patriarchs that it was sinful to have any responsible connection with idols, or to indulge in fornication; and from the time of the law given to the race in the family of Noah, eating blood, and consequently eating things strangled which retained their blood within them, had been wrong, and it will continue to be until the end of the world.³⁴

Guy N. Woods and James B. Coffman are two contemporary scholars who hold this view. In Woods' argument on God's commandment to Noah, he comments, "We have seen that the 'apostles and elders' at Jerusalem, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, extended this prohibition into the Christian age; thus, in every age God has forbidden his people to eat blood and things strangled."³⁵ James B. Coffman also proposes the same view. He comments, "This makes it clear that the denial of blood as food to man antedates the Mosaic law. Thus, they are wrong who see these restrictions as a symbolical binding of the Law on Christians. The authority they have for Christians of all ages derives neither from Moses' law nor from the commandment of Noah, but from the authority of the Holy Spirit..."³⁶

Whan Joon Liu, a Korean theologian and missionary to Taiwan and China, writes that "the abstinence of strangled meat means that we cannot eat meat of strangled animals for the blood is in it. The abstinence of eating blood means we cannot eat blood for it signifies life" (Lev 13:17; Deut 12:16).³⁷ From our understanding, Liu holds the impermissible view. However, he later adds, "these four issues are not related to salvation, but are related to the harmony of Jewish Christians with Gentile believers."³⁸

³⁴ J.W. McGarvey, *New Commentary on Acts of Apostles* (Cincinnati: Standard Publishing, 1892), 66-67.

³⁵ Guy N. Woods, *Questions and Answers: Open Forum* (Vol.1 ; Henderson, TN: Freed-Hardeman University, 1976), 240.

³⁶ Coffman, James Burton, *Commentary on Acts* (Abilene, TX: ACU Press, 1977), 300.

³⁷ Whan Joon Liu 劉煥俊, *Biblical Commentary on The Acts of the Apostles 聖經註釋使徒行傳* (Taipei: the General Assembly of Korean Kosin Presbyterian Church- Chiao Tai Press, 1996), 254.

³⁸ Whan Joon Liu, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 257.

Surprisingly, most evangelical Chinese scholars and ministers believe that abstinence still applies to all Christians. We will discuss their commentaries in our next section.

2. *Permissible View*

For Bruce Metzger, abstinence from blood does not refer to drinking/eating blood or eating meat with blood in it, but rather means “murder.”³⁹ In other words, he implies that the decree does not really prohibit eating blood and strangled meat. Witherington thinks we should not take the application of the prohibition of eating blood and strangled meat in a literal sense, and he states, “the evidence that the choking of the sacrifice, strangling it, and drinking or tasting of blood transpired in pagan temples.”⁴⁰ He views this issue as related to the practice of pagan sacrificial activities. Moreover, he believes these four prohibitions are associated with participation in idol feasts.⁴¹ Therefore, these prohibitions point to the idolatry, not to the act of eating blood, strangled meat, and fornication individually. F.W. Farrar comments that

The “decree” of the “council” was little more than the wise recommendation of a single synod, addressed to a particular district, and possessing only a temporary validity. It was, in fact, a local concordat. Little or no attention has been paid by the universal Church to two of its restrictions... The letter came to the Churches like a message of peace. Its very limitation was, at the time, the best proof of its inspired wisdom.⁴²

J.B. Lightfoot has a similar view; he points out that since the letter was sent only to Antioch, Syria and Cilicia, “there is no reason for supposing that the decree was intended to be permanent and universal.”⁴³

³⁹ Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 429-34.

⁴⁰ Ben Witherington, *The Acts of Apostles*, 646.

⁴¹ Ben Witherington, *Indelible Image* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2010), 716.

⁴² F.W. Farrar, *Life and Work of St. Paul* (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., 1880), 243-44.

⁴³ J.B. Lightfoot, *The Epistles of St. Paul to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970), 127.

R.M. Ogilvie describes how pagans sacrificed to their gods in Roman times: “they slaughter animals by putting knives to their throats and catching the blood in vessels, and the priests would taste the blood.”⁴⁴ John R.W. Stott says: “‘Blood’ refers not to shedding it, but to eat it which was forbidden in Leviticus...and three of them [namely the idol food, strangled meat, and blood] concerned dietary matters which could inhibit Jewish-Gentile common meals. The abstinence would be courteous and temporary.”⁴⁵ He understands the term “blood” as referring to murder. That means James’ teaching is to require the Gentile believers not to continue murdering, and Stott does not explain it as the literal eating of blood and strangled meat.

J.A. Alexander says, “the abstinence here recommended must be understood... not as an essential Christian duty, but as a concession to the conscience of others.”⁴⁶ Many see these two issues as a practical matter rather than a strict rule to observe. Hans Conzelmann comments, “the intention of the decree is not to retain the Law as valid, not even symbolically or ‘in principle.’ The fundamental prescription of circumcision is not imposed. The decree is conceived rather as concession to the gentile Christian, which would enable Jewish Christians to live with them, and particularly to have table fellowship.”⁴⁷ Bruce gives the rationale guiding James’ intention. He comments that

(If) this proposal is carried, then the demand for their circumcision is refused. But there remains the practical question of social intercourse (and especially table fellowship) between Jewish and Gentile believers: it seems reasonable to require Gentile believers to abstain from certain practices which would scandalize their Jewish brothers and set up social barriers between them.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ R.M. Ogilvie, *The Romans and Their Gods in the Age of Augustus* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1970), 49.

⁴⁵ John R. W. Stott, *Acts* (Downers Grove: IVP Press, 1994), 249-250.

⁴⁶ J.A. Alexander, *Commentary on Acts of the Apostles* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1963), 84.

⁴⁷ Hans Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles* (trans. James Limburg, A. Thomas Krabel, and Donald H. Juel; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 118.

⁴⁸ F.F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 342.

Therefore, French L. Arrington concludes that James' proposal was to ask Gentile Christians to avoid certain practices that would offend Jewish believers, and it was for the sake of the feeling of Jewish Christians.⁴⁹

Ajith Fernando, an Asian church leader and scholar, comments, "in the early church eating together was also an important element of community life (Acts 2:46). If there was going to be openhearted fellowship between the Jewish and Gentile Christians, there would have to be some sensitivity to Jewish scruples by Gentiles."⁵⁰ Moreover, he sees that the issues of eating blood and strangled meat had to do with the fellowship meal, where Jews only eat meat without blood in it.⁵¹ He continues, "we noted that these prohibitions were made more out of sensitivity for the scruples of the Jews than for theological reasons. Thus, we can conclude that in applying this passage, we do not need to slavishly follow the prohibitions regarding food. But we learn about the need to be sensitive to the conscience and scruples of fellow believers."⁵²

Richard J. Bauckham explains, "The four prohibitions in the apostolic decree (Acts 15:29) correspond to the four things that are prohibited to "the alien who sojourns in your/their midst" in Leviticus 17-18...In other words, the offences which are prohibited in Leviticus 17-18 and in the apostolic decree are those which were most often regarded as constituting the moral impurity of Gentiles. The fit with the situation in Acts 15 is perfect."⁵³

⁴⁹ French L. Arrington "Acts of Apostles" in *Full Life Bible Commentary to the New Testament* (eds. French L. Arrington and Roger Stronstad; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 613.

⁵⁰ Ajith Fernando, *The NIV Application Commentary: Acts* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 419.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid. 421.

⁵³ Richard J. Bauckham, "James, Peter, and the Gentiles" in *The Missions of James, Peter, and Paul* (eds. Bruce Chilton and Craig Evans; Leiden: Brill, 2005), 119-120.

C. The Investigations of the Issues among Chinese Pastors-Teachers⁵⁴

In the same manner, among Chinese scholars and ministers, there are two groups which view the issues of eating blood and strangled meat differently. The first group sees the issues as impermissible acts, and the second sees them as permissible acts.

1. *The Impermissible Group*

Watchman Nee, who was one of the most influential Chinese theologians or scholars in the twentieth Century, comments that, “One thing that Christians cannot eat is ‘blood.’”⁵⁵ According to Nee, there are three dispensations in which people are prohibited to eat blood. The first is in Noah’s time, when God commanded humans not to eat blood from animals (Gen 9:4); the second is in Moses’ time, when God prohibited humans to consume blood (Lev 17:10-14); the third is in the New Testament era. Thus, we also cannot eat strangled meat. Nee comments that the only blood we can drink is Christ’s blood.⁵⁶ Nee’s meaning of “eating Christ’s blood” allegorically means participating in Christ’s table while drinking Christ’s cup.⁵⁷

Another Chinese expositor-writer, Caleb Huang, explains that strangled meat means meat that contained blood in it, so whoever eats the meat eats the blood as well. He believes “the blood” could also be the literal blood itself, which is not permissible to consume due to the teaching in Genesis 9:4 and Leviticus 17:10-12. The Bible already states clearly that the life is in the blood. Also, the blood directs us to the spiritual

⁵⁴ This section is mainly an investigation of Chinese literature. All collected materials are in Chinese, and the author translated all these from Chinese to English.

⁵⁵ Watchman Nee 倪柝聲, *Building Christian Virtues (II)* 信徒造就-下冊 (Hong Kong: Christian Publisher, 1996), 746. Besides this book, Nee also published more than 70 other books. His ministry was well-known internationally.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 746-47.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 747.

meaning of Jesus' blood, and we can only figuratively drink Jesus' blood to enjoy God's given life.⁵⁸

Jun-Yi Lu, a well-known Taiwan Presbyterian pastor-teacher, categorizes idol food, strangled meat and blood as dietary regulations. The idol food is associated with worshipping pagan gods, and eating this food equals affirming the belief of pagan worship. Therefore, rejecting the eating of idol food manifests one's rejection of pagan belief.⁵⁹ For the issue of abstaining from the strangled meat, Lu explains that the prohibition against using it is because the meat contains blood in it, and Leviticus 17 teaches that the life is in its blood. For Jews, meat of animals is for people to consume, yet the blood is for ceremonial use for redeeming of sins.⁶⁰

Later, Lu brings us to Paul's view: in the issue of dietary regulations, Paul reminds Christians that "food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do" (1 Cor 8:8). However, Paul reminds the Corinthians not to cause the weak brothers and sisters to stumble due to their liberty in eating food.⁶¹ Lu identifies the weak party as the Jewish Christians; the content of the Apostolic Decree is not related to Gentile's salvation.⁶²

Jun-Lan Dong sees abstinence from strangled meat and blood as the same issue, in association with the teaching of Leviticus 17:10-14. The strangled animal is an animal that is slaughtered without draining out all the blood. Eating it is similar to eating blood,

⁵⁸ Caleb Huang, *Biblical Interpretation Series: Acts (II)* (Fountain Valley: Christian Digest, 2003), 12. Huang is one of the most popular expositors in the Chinese community, and has published several volumes.

⁵⁹ Jun-Yi Lu (盧俊義), *The Message of the Acts of the Apostles (II)-使徒行傳的信息-下* (Taipei: XinFu Publishing, 2010), 30-31. Lu is a minister of the Presbyterian Church of Taiwan, and he hosts a Bible study hour on Good News TV in Taiwan. He is also an adjunct lecturer at Tainan Theological Seminary, Taiwan.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 30-31.

⁶¹ Ibid., 31-32.

⁶² Ibid., 32.

and is not permissible according to the Bible. They are forbidden for two main reasons: blood symbolizes life, and the purpose of blood is for atonement for sins.⁶³ Dong draws us to pay attention to Acts 15: 21, where James reminds Jewish believers not to cause trouble to the Gentile believers by requesting they be circumcised. At the same time, James reminds Gentile Christians not to stir Jewish believers' emotions. In other words, both Jews and Gentiles are to draw one step backward from their positions.⁶⁴ Dong clearly proposes the view of not eating blood. John H. H. Su holds a similar view on these two issues: eating blood and strangled meat are not permissible because they are stated clearly in Moses' teaching, and all have to respect it. Therefore, for the sake of love, we must not ignore the issues of abstinence from strangled meat and blood.⁶⁵

Yu-Ming Chia sees abstinence from strangled meat and blood as related, for the strangled meat contains blood in it, and eating blood is not permitted for the Bible clearly teaches that it is forbidden to eat blood. Therefore, no matter whether they are Jewish Christians or Gentile Christians, all are to keep the commandment of not eating blood. The Gentile Christian should not feel burdened when observing it.⁶⁶

Vincent Cheung also views abstinence from strangled meat and eating blood as related issues. He comments that the strangled meat is related to blood, and means the meat that contains blood in it. This item is taken from Leviticus 17, where the Israelites are forbidden to consume meat from animals that are choked or meat that contains blood

⁶³ Jun-Lan Dong 董俊蘭, *The Witness of the Acts of the Apostles-使徒行傳的見證* (Tainan: Presbyterian Church of Taiwan Press, 2011), 233. Dong received his Ph.D. from the University of Edinburgh, and he is a pastor-teacher among the Taiwanese speaking community.

⁶⁴ Dong, *Witness*, 233.

⁶⁵ John H. H. Su- 蘇曉星, *An Exposition on the Acts of the Apostles-使徒行傳註釋* (Taipei: Yong Wang 永望, 2010), 271.

⁶⁶ Yu-Ming Chia 賈玉銘, *Exposition of Acts* (Chungli, Taiwan: Heavenly People Depot, 1967), 187. Chia (1880 -1964) was one of the most famous Chinese scholars and one of the earliest Bible commentators in China. He wrote many biblical commentaries and theological books, and these books still influence many Chinese readers. Also, he was vice-principal at North China Theological Seminary.

in it.⁶⁷ He believes that the issue is related to Jewish dietary law and is not about morality and ceremony. Therefore, James' concern is connected to the relationship between Gentile Christians and Jewish believers, and these four abstinences are for the sake of respecting Jewish believers.⁶⁸ Cheung believes that James' argument is not to present a theological position, but it is about Christian obligation in their practical lives to establish a peaceful and unified spirit between believers from two different cultural backgrounds.⁶⁹ His impermissible view is not a theological one, but it is for practical reasons.

2. *The Permissible Group*

Stephen C.T. Chen, a well-known Bible scholar in Southeast Asia, remarks that the Jerusalem Council's decree is not a condition for Gentile's salvation; "it is merely about Christian character and testimony for the sake of neutralizing the circumcised party's extreme request."⁷⁰ In addition, he comments that for Jewish Christians who have observed the law of Moses for generations, it is hard for them to change their thinking immediately. Therefore, James' decision to list these four important concerns for Gentile believers to adhere to is meant to give Jewish Christians enough time to accept Gentile believers.⁷¹ In addition, Chen concludes that the main principles of these four prohibitions of the council are only designated to three affected churches, in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia (Acts 15:23), and for easing the emotions of the radical group, the

⁶⁷ Vincent Cheung 張永信, *Tien Dao Bible Commentary: Acts* (Hong Kong: Tien Dao Publishing, 2000), 403. Cheung received all his theological training in North America, and he is the coordinator of the Alliance Training Center in Hong Kong. He also teaches in several seminaries.

⁶⁸ Cheung, *Tien Dao – Acts*, 403.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 404.

⁷⁰ Stephen C.T. Chen 陳終道, *To the Ends of the Earth: Commentary of Acts* (Hong Kong: China Alliance Press, 1998), 243. He is famous due to his voluminous Bible commentaries, and has taught in many Chinese seminaries in Hong Kong and Southeast Asia. In his later years, he pastored a Chinese church in Vancouver, Canada. He was also famous as a nephew of the Chinese theologian, Watchman Nee.

⁷¹ Stephen C.T. Chen, *To the Ends of the Earth*, 243.

circumcised party. At the end of the letter to the Gentile churches, where it is written that they would do well if they avoid those issues (Acts 15:29b), the language of the statement is not a commandment.⁷² In other words, Chen believes that these four prohibitions should not apply to contemporary Christians, for the decree was to help establish a relational bridge between Jewish Christian and Gentile believers.⁷³

Chia-Shih Chen comments that James disagrees with the requirement of circumcision for the Gentile Christians, and the four prohibitions are for harmony with the Jewish Christians' lifestyle and religious consciences. Jewish Christians have observed these rules of life for many generations, and these teachings can be heard everywhere in all synagogues.⁷⁴ His point is that the decree is for practical purposes, because Jews were concerned about these issues. Another Chinese scholar, Grant Chen believes that the issues of eating blood and strangled meat should be one matter. However, he asks, "Is this matter ritual or moral?" He answers that the abstinence is ritual, for it is to help these new Gentile converts to avoid the temptation to go back and participate in the temple feasts; yet it is also moral because it helps to train them to live ethically. The issue of fornication is clearly ethical, yet strangled meat and blood are considered as ritual elements of pagan worship.⁷⁵ However, G. Chen reminds his readers to apply Paul's principle of love, for it is more important than the rigid rule.⁷⁶

⁷² Ibid., 245-46.

⁷³ Ibid., 247.

⁷⁴ Chia-Shih Chen- 陳嘉式, *Chinese Bible Commentary* 中文聖經註釋: *The Acts of the Apostles* (Hong Kong: Chinese Christian Literature Council, 1998), 179.

⁷⁵ Grant Chen-陳宗清, *Acts – 恩福靈筵系列:使徒使傳* (Taipei: Campus Evangelical Fellowship, 2004), 139-140.

⁷⁶ G. Chen, *Acts*, 140. Grant Chen received his Ph.D. from Trinity Evangelical School of Theology, and he is the President of The Blessings Foundation, Inc. Chen teaches in many seminaries in the United States and is guest lecturer in several universities in China. Before he served in his current position, he was a pastor in several churches in the United States.

Conclusion

This chapter leads us to see the importance of studying the issues of “strangled meat” and “blood” in the Apostolic decree, and that these very issues have been discussed since the early church era. Historical investigation reveals two views, namely the impermissible and permissible views, and these are the products of different approaches to interpreting the issues. The impermissible group tends to interpret the text according to the Noahic covenant and the Mosaic Law in Leviticus 17-18, as the continuous commandment to Jews as well as to Gentiles. However, the permissible group views the teaching as limited to Gentile converts in specific locations, and the stipulations as designed for bridging the table-fellowship between Jewish and Gentile believers. As Wing-Hung Lam comments, if Jews and Gentile believers have to live together in the church, James, based on Jewish weakness, finds a suitable way by ordering Gentile believers to abstain from the defilement of idols, fornication, and strangled meat and blood.⁷⁷

Is the above literary study sufficient to answer our questions about the prohibitions of “strangled meat” and “blood”? Of course, no. We believe that good answers may be found through our next study of the background of Acts, including the author’s background, identity, and purpose for writing this book. Also, we have to do a serious exegetical work on Acts 15:19-20, based on the Greek text and its historical-sociological context of the time.

⁷⁷ Wing-Hung Lam 林榮洪, *Contemporary Messages Series: The Message of Acts* 前車之鑒: 使徒行傳進解 (Hong Kong: Ming Dao, 2010), 247. Lam earned his Ph.D. from Princeton Theological Seminary, and he is professor at Tyndale Canadian Chinese School of Theology.

CHAPTER 2

ANALYSIS OF THE ISSUE OF STRANGLED MEAT AND EATING BLOOD IN ACTS 15:20

A. Introduction

We divide this chapter into six main sections. First, we discuss the background of Acts by studying the author's background, identity, and purpose for writing this book. Then, we will introduce the context of Acts 15:19-20. Third, we will discuss the role of Acts 15:19-20 in connection to the whole book of Acts and to the immediate context. Fourth, we will briefly discuss verification of the text. Fifth is the exegesis of Acts 15:19-20, which is the main part of this chapter. We will study issues of the prohibitions against idol-food, fornication, eating strangled meat and blood. The study will be based on the Greek text and its historical-sociological context of the time.

B. The Historical Context of Acts

Although Acts does not identify the author, we can recognize that the same author wrote the book of Luke, and he was someone who knew Jesus' disciples. Tradition records that Luke is the author of this book, as Eusebius writes, "In the preface Luke explains the origin of his work: since many others had somewhat hastily tried to write an account of things for which he was fully informed, he felt obliged to free us from the dubious efforts of others by providing an accurate account based on his association with Paul and conversation with other apostles" (*Hist. Eccl.* 3.24.14-16). In his writing *Against the Heresies*, Irenaeus mentions that Paul's mission work is compatible with Luke's account (*Haer.* 3.13.3). Also, Clement of Alexandria's restatement of Paul's

phrase in Athens is similar to Acts 17 (*Strom.* 5.12.82.4). Later Origen mentions in many places that Luke was the author of Acts.¹ Additionally, some manuscripts identify the author; for example, a Syrian version in the fifth century entitled it as “The Book of Acts; that is, of Narratives of the Blessed Legates: compiled by Saint Luke, the Evangelist.”²

Today, scholars believe this book was written around A.D. 60-70,³ and “a considerable time before the destruction of Jerusalem”⁴ which occurred around A.D. 70. In the preface to Theophilus, the author has included himself as part of Paul’s mission, especially in the “we” sections (16:10-17; 20:5-15; 21:1-18; 27:1-28:16). Therefore, the author was Paul’s companion on his mission trips, and Paul mentions Luke as his fellow worker (Phlm 24) and as his dear friend (Col 4:14). Luke accompanied Paul during his second imprisonment in Rome (2 Tim 4:11). Professionally, he was trained as a doctor (Col 4:14), and ethnically, he was a Gentile.⁵ Clinton Arnold says, “[Luke] had excellent training in Greek, knew the art of rhetoric, had superb research and compositional skills, and was familiar with the conventions of historical writing in the Hellenistic tradition.”⁶ Luke collected the eyewitness accounts of the disciples about Jesus the Nazarene, carefully investigated, and wrote an orderly account of the gospel of Jesus Christ (Luke 1:1-4) and an account of the development of the gospel to Theophilus (Acts 1:1-5).

¹ Origen; *Cles.* 611; *Commentary of Matthew* 15:15; 17:25.

² *The New Testament-A Literal Translation From the Syriac Peschito Version* (trans. James Murdock; London: Scriptural Tract Repository, 1892), 212; also see Thomas Hartwell Horne, *An Introduction to the Critical Study of the Holy Scriptures* (Philadelphia: Desilver, Thomas, 1836), 318.

³ Colin J. Hemer gives a list of the possible dates of Acts, and most conservative scholars believe this book was written around 60-70, such as Donald Guthrie, F.F. Bruce, I.H. Marshall, and A.T. Robertson; Colin J. Hemer, *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History* (Tubingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1989), 367-370.

⁴ John Kitto, *A Cyclopædia of Biblical Literature* (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1845), 277.

⁵ Clinton E. Arnold, *Acts* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 5.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 5-6.

But who is Theophilus? In the preface of the Third Gospel, the author salutes the recipient as κράτιστε Θεόφιλε, which means “most honorable, Theophilus.” The same phrase is used by the same author in Acts 24:3 to describe the governor, Felix, who held a political title and high social status. Therefore, we can say Theophilus was a “high official” and had a high “social position.”⁷ However, Theophilus literally means “lover of God” in Greek; therefore, some believe that the author used this term for presenting Jesus’ account to the Gentiles who had not fully understood the gospel of Jesus Christ.⁸ The main goal of writing to Theophilus is to challenge him to come to know (ἵνα ἐπιγνῶς)⁹ the certainty of the message that he had been taught about Jesus the Messiah, and the second volume, Acts, is to show God’s redemptive plan first to Jews, then to Gentiles, through the fulfilment of Christ’s work. Through the writing about the magnificent work of the Holy Spirit by means of the apostles in the church, Luke also wants to remind Theophilus to take part in this mission movement and to prepare him for the future possible hardships attendant upon sharing his faith.¹⁰

Many believe that Luke wrote this book from Rome,¹¹ as Paul mentions that Luke was with him during his second imprisonment there (2 Tim 4:11). If Luke was with Paul during his second imprisonment, it is reasonable to believe that Luke was gathering all this information from Paul during his first imprisonment. Yet, other scholars such as A. T.

⁷ Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich, and F. W. Danker, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 449; it will be identified as BDAG.

⁸ Kenneth O. Gangel, *Holman New Testament Commentary – Acts* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1998), 2.

⁹ ἵνα identifies the purpose of the writing, and ἐπιγνῶς (aorist. act. subj. 2 plural) means “you might come to know.” The author’s purpose of writing is to help Theophilus to know about what he was taught before.

¹⁰ Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 378.

¹¹ Irenaeus (*Haer.* 3.11; 3:14:1) and Eusebius (*Eccl. hist.* 2.22.6) hold this position.

Robertson hold the view that Luke wrote it in Achaia, “in the Greek world.”¹² The anti-Marcionite prologue says that Luke came from Antioch and wrote his gospel while “in the region of Achaia.”¹³ Still others believe that it was written in Caesarea, for the author was actively involved in ministry in that region.¹⁴

As a serious historian, Luke wants faithfully to present the account of the acts of the Apostles after Pentecost, and his writing is based on historical facts that he has collected firsthand from eyewitnesses and has carefully investigated (Luke 1: 1-4): “Acts has long been understood as the first example of historiography.”¹⁵ According to the style of the writing, “as much as 30 percent of the book consists of speeches; evangelistic sermons, speeches in Acts 2, 3, 13, and 17; speeches in a council’s deliberations in Acts 15; a farewell speech in Acts 20; defense speeches in Acts 22, 24, and 26.”¹⁶ The account of those speeches indicates the evidence of personal involvements that manifest the truthfulness of the book.

In the preface, the author wants to present his continued account of Jesus’ identity and His promise through the work of the Holy Spirit (1:1-2). Jesus Christ physically appears to the apostles and promises them the filling of the Holy Spirit (1:3-11), and, therefore, the Spirit rests on the disciples and they are empowered to speak with other tongues at Pentecost (2:1-13). The empowerment of the Holy Spirit has prepared them to advance Christ’s Great Commission (Matt 28:19-20; Luke 24:47-48). Peter preaches a

¹² A T Robertson, *Luke the Historian in the Light of Research* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1936), 29.

¹³ D. A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo, and Leon Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 115.

¹⁴ Edward Earle Ellis, *History and Interpretation in New Testament Perspective* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2001), 136-37.

¹⁵ J.B. Green, “Acts of the Apostles” in *The IVP Dictionary of the New Testament* (ed. Daniel G. Reid; Downer Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 16.

¹⁶ David A. deSilva, *An Introduction to the New Testament: Context, Method, and Ministry* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 351.

sermon to the house of Israel that Jesus was the Messiah, and three thousand believe and get baptized and start a new community (2:14-47). The gospel expands in Jerusalem by the witness of the Apostles regardless of external attacks and internal difficulties (3:1-7:57). Stephen, one of the seven men who are selected to help the Apostles, stands up and boldly testifies for Christ, yet some arise to bear false witness, and they cause his death (6:7-7:57). Nevertheless, God has done something special out of that unfortunate event by spreading the gospel to Samaria and Judea (8:1-9:43; Rom 8:28). Uniquely, God even causes a persecutor called Paul to encounter Jesus during his journey to destroy the church, and later this persecutor becomes the apostle to the Gentiles, who in turn is himself persecuted. Peter is the first to bring the gospel to the Gentiles, and his ministry is officially confirmed by the leaders in Jerusalem (10:1-12:25). The expansion of the mission to the Gentiles is led by Paul. The Council of Jerusalem plays a role as the official transitional point of the Gospel ministry to the Gentiles. The council confirms Paul's apostleship, and, more importantly, the position of the Gentiles in the church. Unquestionably, the council has prepared Paul for his second and third mission journeys to Asia, Macedonia, and Achaia (15:35-18:22). When he is in Corinth,¹⁷ he writes the epistle to the Romans in order to prepare for his plan to go to Spain, yet God uses a different way to get Paul to Rome, the chain. He is arrested in Jerusalem while testifying for Christ, then jailed in Caesarea and sent to Rome (21:27- 28:31). The end of the book does not end Christ's work in this capital of the Roman Empire, but, on the contrary, through Paul, God's work expands to a greater extent.

¹⁷ Ben Witherington and Darlene Hyatt III, *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 7.

From the observation of the progress of Christ's church in Acts, we observe that tensions occur every time the gospel enters into new cultures; the impact of the gospel creates new perspectives of life that are usually quite different from the existing culture, and tensions appear due to conflict between the cultural system and the new value system. Marvelously, in every conflict between cultures and the gospel, the gospel prevails and the mission expands.

The Mission in Jerusalem	The Mission in Judea & Samaria	The Mission in Gentile Nations
Chs 1 → 7	Chs 8 → 9b	Chs 9c → 28

Figure 1. The Divisions of the Mission in Acts

C. The Context of Acts 15:19-20

Figure 1 shows that Acts may be divided into three parts: Chapters 1-7 relate to the mission to Jerusalem, Chapters 8-9 relate to the mission to Judea and Samaria, and Chapters 9-28 are written about the mission to the Gentiles. Luke's intention of placing Chapter 15 as the center of the mission to the Gentiles is significant because the apostolic leadership of the Jerusalem church plays an important role in directing the church and, thus, also in the view of interpreting the meaning of the Bible.

Figure 2 indicates the importance of Chapter 15 in Acts; it is not merely a record of the conflict and resolution between Jewish believers and Gentile Christians, but it also officially confirms the position of the Gentile Christians. David K. Strong comments, "Luke's primary purpose is to underscore the fact that the Jerusalem church embraced the Gentile mission, a decision that enabled the church to continue growing to the ends of the

earth. In the process Luke prioritizes mission over cultural constraints.”¹⁸ The decree not only confirms the acceptance of Gentile believers regardless of their former experience of idolatrous practices, but helps them to live rightly and in harmony with Jewish Christians.

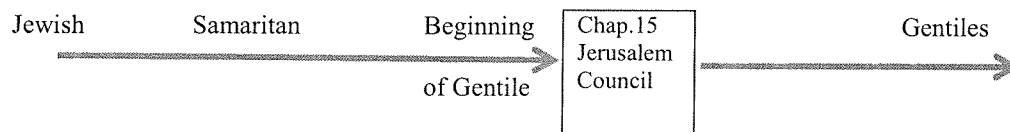


Figure 2. The Expansion of the Mission of the Church and the Jerusalem Council

The background of the immediate text, namely Chapter 15, is the outcome of Paul and Barnabas’ mission to Gentile regions in Chapters 13-14. Many Jews and Gentiles have heard the Gospel and believed in Jesus Christ, and the missionaries report their work to the sending church, Antioch. While staying there, certain Jewish Christians come to teach that Gentile Christians have to be circumcised in order to be saved, and Paul and Barnabas are arguing vehemently with them, for they disagreed with this teaching. Then the church delegates Paul and Barnabas to settle the issue at Jerusalem (Acts 15:1-2). Eventually, this issue causes the whole church to meet in Jerusalem for a serious discussion. After arriving in Jerusalem, Paul and Barnabas report everything God has done through their ministry to all the church leaders, including the apostles and elders. Yet, their opponents from the sect of the Pharisees insist that the Gentile believers must be circumcised and required to keep the Law of Moses (15:5). After a long debate, Peter shares his experience of how God has used him in leading the Gentiles to believe in the Gospel, and the event confirms that God does not show partiality; God demonstrates His mercy to the Gentiles by giving them the Holy Spirit just as to the Jews. Peter reminds

¹⁸ David K. Strong, “The Jerusalem Council: Some Implications for Contextualization” in *Mission in Acts: Ancient Narratives in Contemporary Context* (eds. Robert L. Gallagher and Paul Hertig; Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2004), 196-208.

them not to burden the Gentile believers with a yoke, which is Jewish tradition (15:7-10). Also, he reminds them of the heart of the Gospel; Jews and Gentiles are all saved the same way, by the undeserved grace of Jesus Christ (15:11). Alan J. Thompson comments, “The significance of the dispute is then seen in Peter’s application of this soteriological unity to the dispute at the Council.”¹⁹

Later, Paul and Barnabas share their mission experience among the Gentiles and how God has used their work to bring them to Christ (15:12). In the end, James, the pillar of the church in Jerusalem, stands and speaks, and he confirms Peter’s testimony by fitting it together with Amos’ prophecy (9:11-12). This prophecy foretells Gentiles joining Jews to be God’s people when the house of David is restored (15:13-18). James reminds them that they should not cause trouble for the Gentile believers, and he sees that wanting them to be circumcised is to cause them trouble. Then he recommends to the council to write to these Gentile believers, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood. Before James ends his speech, he gives the reason why those issues, those four abstinences, are mentioned: because Mosaic law has been preached in every city from the earliest times, and it is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath (Acts 15:19-21). In other words, it is not easy for most Jewish believers immediately to change the practices that they have kept for generations, and the resolution to keep these four prohibitions is to give them time to become more accustomed to the Gentiles Christians.²⁰

The council discusses, debates, analyzes, and resolves the issue by going back to the very basics of the Scripture and the evangelistic testimonies of Peter, Paul and

¹⁹ Alan J. Thompson, *One Lord, One People: The Unity of the Church in Acts in Its Literary Setting* (London: T & T Clark, 2008), 101.

²⁰ Stephen C.T. Chen, *To the End of the Earth*, 243.

Barnabas. Then the council writes the letter and chooses Judas and Silas, with Paul and Barnabas, to bring the letter to the Gentile churches in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia. This letter receives a good reception among the Gentiles, and there was great joy throughout the church (15:30-31).

D. Immediate Text

The conversion of the Samaritans does not become a major issue for the Jews because the Samaritans have certain similarities to Jews. However, when the Gospel is brought to Cornelius and his company, the Jewish believers criticize Peter for entering and eating with the Gentiles (11:2-3). Their complaint is not merely about the Gentiles becoming Christians, but because Jewish culture forbids any Jews entering and eating with Gentiles. During that era, Jews are to keep the commandment to be separate from the Gentiles and not to eat with them (*Jub.* 22:16). However, if the Gentile believers circumcise themselves, they would be officially accepted as part of the Jewish community. Moreover, Gentiles were considered as unrighteous, for their deeds were idolatrous, fornications, and lustful (*Jub.* 20:5-7; 25:1).²¹

The issue of circumcision leads the apostles, elders and church leaders meeting in Jerusalem to engage in long hours of discussion, and eventually the meeting concludes with a resolution. James urges them not to trouble the Gentile believers by requiring them to be circumcised in order to be part of the community of the Church of Jesus Christ. The issue of circumcision is eliminated, yet James recommends for them to write to these

²¹ Richard Bauckham, "Peter, James, and The Gentiles" in *The Missions of James, Peter, and Paul* (eds. Bruce Chilton and Craig Evans; Leiden: Brill, 2005), 95; Richard Bauckham comments, "Particularly emphatic is the book of *Jubilees*' condemnation of Gentiles in general, Gentile inhabitants of the land of Israel in particular, as defiled and defiling the land. Their impurities are characterized as idolatry and sexual sins (*Jub.* 1:9; 20:5-7; 25:1)."

Gentile believers to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood. For some, James' decision is viewed as a decree of the council to the Gentile believers, yet some believe it is just a suggestion. Today, these divisive views have led some Chinese church leaders to split. Some believe that if James' decision is a decree, they have to observe it without any questions. However, others believe that if the decision is merely a suggestion, it is only a guideline for Christians.

E. The Textual Verification

There are three textual variations in Acts 15:20 that affect our study. The earliest Greek manuscripts of a variety of text-types, including the most reliable text-type, Alexandrian, support the current text. We can see Appendix 1 for further information.

F. The Exegesis of Acts 15:19-21

The Translation of Acts 15:19-21

*Therefore, I myself am determining not to trouble the ones among the Gentiles when they convert to God, but to write them in order to abstain from (things) of defilement of idols, and the fornication, and the strangled meat, and the blood. For Moses, since the former generations in every city has the ones proclaiming him, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath.*²²

Verses 19 and 20 are part of the continued sentence of James' speech (See Appendix 2). The conjunction "for" in verse 21 is a concluding statement. Verse 20 contains the list of the four prohibitions, which is also repeated as the Apostolic Decree in 15:29. Our exegesis must include the context of verses 16-18, and verse 21 must be included for it

²² See the work of the translation in Appendix 2.

concludes James' speech. Here we can divide the text into four parts: (1) James' Determination; (2) James' Intention; (3) The Letter to the Gentile Believers; (4) The Reason for the Decree.

James' Determination.

a. *"Therefore, I am determining"* (διὸ ἐγὼ κρίνω)

The conjunction διὸ connects with James' assessment of Peter, Paul and Barnabas' testimonies. Luke does not mention how lengthy the debates and testimonies were, but we believe it should have been a long meeting (15:7). After all have spoken, James makes a decision or recommendation for the meeting.

b. *"I am determining"* (...ἐγὼ κρίνω)

James says, "I myself am determining (ἐγὼ κρίνω) not to trouble the ones among the Gentiles..." The word κρίνω means "to make a decision," "to pass a judgment on certain things," "to make a conclusion," "to sentence to receive a judgment," and "to propose something."²³ Does James make a judgment? Or does he make a proposal for others to agree with him? Or does he make the decision according to his own judgment? If James' speech is just a proposal or a preference, we believe that his words would be quite weak or unauthoritative. Mikeal Parsons and Martin Culy comment, "The apparently formal nature of the meeting and the explicit fronted subject pronoun ἐγὼ tend to support the

²³ The following is taken from Appendix 3- Word Studies (Acts 15:19-20). κρίνω means "making a judgment" or "passing judgment on certain persons." It could also mean "making a decision or conclusion," and sometimes it means "condemn," or "sentence to receive a judgment." In the Old Testament, we can go to the LXX²³ to find similar or related words to κρίνω. In Psalm 74:2, God says, "When I shall take a set time, I will judge (κρίνω) righteously." God shows vengeance based on His justice (Isa 49:25; Jer 58:36; Ezek 18:30; 34:22).²³ In Daniel the word means "making a decree" (3:29); BDAG, 451.

view that James was voicing more than his personal preference.”²⁴ Someone might ask, “why then did he not say ‘we’?” James, as the representative of the council, made his concluding statement with the consent of the Apostles and the elders, and the salutation of the letter clearly indicates his representation; the letter writes that, “The brothers, both the apostles and the elders, to the brothers who are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia, greetings” (Act 15:23 ESV).

Some translate it as “my judgment is ...”²⁵ or “it is my judgment,”²⁶ and his judgment is based on Peter and Paul and Barnabas’ testimonies. We believe that Luke did not record every word or detail of the council, and Peter’s report should be longer than what is recorded here. Peter was the first one personally to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles in Cornelius’ house, and he was the primary eyewitness that they were filled by the Holy Spirit when they came to faith in Jesus Christ. Peter’s interaction with the Gentiles had caused some Jews to be uneasy, and he defended his position by presenting to them how God prepared a vision and instructed him not to treat those who are clean as unclean (Acts 11). Although the voice in the vision seems to point to both the food and the people, actually it signifies the Gentile believers. In Acts 15:16-18, James quotes Leviticus 17-18. Robert P. Gordon outlines Leviticus 17-18 as below:²⁷

1. Laws on Sacrifice (17:1-16)
 - (a) Concerning Animal Slaughter (17:1-9)
 - (b) Prohibition on Blood (17:10-16)
2. Laws of Chastity (18:1-30)

²⁴ Mikeal C. Parsons and Martin M. Culy, *Acts: A Handbook on the Greek Text* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2003), 294.

²⁵ ESV.

²⁶ NAS.

²⁷ Robert P. Gordon, “Leviticus” in *Zondervan Bible Commentary* (ed. F.F. Bruce; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 108-136.

By looking at Gordon's outline, we can see that "These two chapters in Leviticus do address issues concerning idolatry, sexual immorality, and blood, and the purpose of that section in Leviticus is to facilitate the interaction between Israelites and foreigners within the same land and community."²⁸ Painter comments, "The decree is an expression of a reading of the Mosaic law (Leviticus 17-18) as relevant to the situation of Gentiles living in the midst of Jews, the situation of resident aliens. In Acts the demands of decree represent James' judgment, assented to by the assembly, concerning the minimal requirements to be fulfilled if Gentile believers were to be 'saved' (Acts 15:1, 5)."²⁹ Craig Blomberg states that the Apostolic Decree is related to Leviticus 17-18 for "Christians keeping that part of the Mosaic Law originally intended for them."³⁰

In the council, Peter wants them to recall what he had witnessed to them ten years ago:³¹ that God chose him to preach to the Gentiles. The clear sign for the Gentiles having the same privilege of receiving the gospel can be identified by the gift of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, God did not show partiality between Jews and Gentiles. Peter's main point is to lead them to see salvation is through faith in Christ (15: 9), and salvation comes from the undeserved grace of Christ (15:11). Because all are saved by grace through faith, so no one must add the burden of the Mosaic Law to the Gentile believers. Indeed, James hears and confirms it as evidence of the fulfillment of Amos' prophecy (Acts 15:16-18; Amos 9:11-12).

²⁸ Gary M. Burge and Andrew E. Hill, eds., *The Baker Illustrated Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 1196. Also see S.G. Wilson, *Luke and Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); he explains, "The purpose of the prohibitions was to avoid pollution of the land such as had been caused by misdeeds of Israel's pagan predecessors in Canaan." (Wilson, *Luke and Law*, 84)

²⁹ John Painter, "Models of Leadership and Mission," in *The Missions of James, Peter, and Paul* (eds. Bruce Chilton and Craig Evans; Leiden: Brill, 2015), 141-209.

³⁰ Craig L. Blomberg, "The Christian and Law of Moses" in *Witness to the Gospel- The Theology of Acts* (eds. I Howard Marshall and David Peterson; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 397-416.

³¹ The approximate date of Peter's visit to the house of Cornelius was A.D. 38; 10 years later, Peter shared his testimony to the council about this event.

James' Intention

James decides “not to trouble (μὴ παρενοχλεῖν)³² the Gentiles when they convert to God.” James reminds them that Jewish Christians must not “cause trouble” or “attack abusively” the Gentile believers. He sees adding the requirement of circumcision is to cause trouble or make it difficult for the Gentile believers. James uses “causing trouble” (παρενοχλέω). It is a powerful, colorful, and negative word, which denotes its potential destroying power, like the way Delilah had been troubling Samson (Judg 16:16).³³ James reminds them of the harmful consequences of insisting on the issue. His explanation for not wanting the Gentile believers to undergo circumcision is because he has noticed that the Gentile converts are saved by grace through faith, not by keeping the Law of Moses.

The Letter to the Gentile Believers

James continues, “but to write them in order to abstain from (things) of defilement of idols, and the fornication, and the strangled meat, and the blood” (v. 20).

The conjunction “but” (ἀλλὰ) makes a strong contrast between “not to cause trouble” in the previous verse and “to write them (a letter).” In other words, instead of increasing their burden and requiring them to get circumcision, James wants to present a positive idea to the Gentile believers.³⁴ If the contrast ἀλλὰ wants to present a positive idea, the following are two possible ways to infer good news from James' statement: first

³² This section is taken from Appendix 3- The Word Studies (Acts 15:19-20). The word παρενοχλέω means “to cause trouble,” “to annoy,” or “to attack someone abusively.” This word appears twice in Samson's case; he was troubled and pressed sore by words, and eventually he compromised with others (Judg 14:17; 16:16). Also see Keener, *Acts*, 2259; he uses “annoying” to describe “παρενοχλέω” for he says this word term appears fourteen times in the LXX.

³³ Clinton E. Arnold, “Acts” in *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Background Commentary* (ed. Clinton E. Arnold; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 360.

³⁴ When ἀλλὰ is followed by a negation (οὐ or μὴ), it makes a strong contrast to a preceding positive statement. See also BDAG, 38.

is that the letter is an encouraging letter to the Gentile Christians, and second is that the letter with these prohibitions is a comforting letter. Actually, both the letter and its contents are encouraging aspects for the Gentile believers. However, the second idea seems to be adding “the Law of Moses” rather than releasing the Gentiles of their burden.

James decides “to write them a letter” (ἐπιστεῖλαι αὐτοῖς), and the letter is to be sent to the churches in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia (15:23). The main goal is to clarify the issue and to comfort the Gentile believers. It explains that the members of the council understand their struggles that have been caused by false teaching, and clarify that it was not the council’s position to require Gentile believers to be circumcised (15:23-24). Also, this letter affirms the official teaching of salvation by grace alone and through faith alone, and the council’s position is based on Peter’s testimony and Paul and Barnabas’ defense of the biblical teaching of the Gospel. In addition, the letter commands them to abstain from (things) that are defiled by idols, from fornication, from strangled meat, and from blood.

Besides Paul and Barnabas, the council has chosen Judas and Silas to accompany them to deliver this letter, and the Gentile believers, when they read this encouraging message, were joyful (15: 31). Luke, the author, does not mention any negative reactions toward the council’s decision on the four prohibitions, and it seems that the decree does not become an issue for them to keep.

Let us study these four prohibitions. According to the Apostolic Decree, the Gentile believers must “abstain from (things) of the defilement of idols, and the fornication, and the strangled meat, and blood” (15:20).

- a. “to abstain from” (τοῦ ἀπέχεσθαι)³⁵

The word “to abstain from” is in the present tense, passive voice, and infinitive mood, and a literal translation is “to be distant from” or “to keep far away from something evil/sinful.” Parsons and Culy comment that, “The articular infinitive could be viewed as the clausal complement (Direct Object) of ἐπιστεῖλαι.”³⁶ To abstain from certain things means to keep away or to be distant from them.³⁷ Here James wants them to abstain from four things: from (things) of the defilement of idols, from fornication, from the strangled meat, and from blood.

- b. “to abstain *from (things) of the defilement of idols*” (τῶν ἀλισγημάτων τῶν εἰδώλων)

The language of “the defilement or the pollution of idols” usually refers to things or foods that are defiled or polluted by association with idols. The defilement (ἀλίσγημα)³⁸ is related to the things that become impure ceremonially, and many translations refer to it as food or things that had been offered to idols.

The lexicon form for εἰδώλων is εἰδωλον; εἰδωλον refers to an “idol,” “false god,” or “image.”³⁹ Therefore, εἰδώλων refers to idol-food or things sacrificed to idols. The

³⁵ See Appendix 3. The word has various meanings; the first could mean “to keep away from” sinful or immoral acts (1 Thess 4:3; 1 Pet 2:2). When it is in the middle voice, a second meaning is “receiving a reward” and a third is “enough.” 1 Sam 21:5, Job 1:1, 28:28, and Ezek 11:15 describe “keeping far away from evils.”

³⁶ Parsons and Culy, *Acts*, 294.

³⁷ BDAG, 84-85.

³⁸ It is taken from Appendix 3. The word means “pollution” or “defilement;” this word appears only once. The related word ἀλίζω means “polluted ceremonially” (Mark 9:49). In LXX, Daniel purposed in his heart, that he would not defile himself with the king's table, nor with the wine of his drink: and he entreated the chief of the eunuchs that he might not defile (μὴ ἀλισγηθῇ) himself (Dan 1:8 LXE). Also, in Lev 2:13, it is written, “and every gift of your sacrifice shall be seasoned with salt; omit not the salt of the covenant of the Lord from your sacrifices: on every gift of yours ye shall offer salt (ἀλισθήσεται) to the Lord your God.” Therefore, the word means pollution ceremonially due to the worship of idols; see also BDAG, 37.

³⁹ This section is taken from Appendix 3. The word means images of idols that are made from metals, wood, or stones. Often, it means false gods. The LXX sometimes translates the word (לַעֲצָוָה) as

council forbids the Gentile believers to be involved in any defilement from idols⁴⁰ or to eat anything associated with defilement of idols. The former could mean participation in idol worship, as it is an act of defilement. However, many translate this word as “things of the defilement of idols”⁴¹ or “food sacrificed to idols.”⁴² We can put these two words together to say that the one who is defiled (15:20) through participating in the worship of idols would also eat εἰδωλόθυτον “food sacrificed to idols” (15:29).⁴³ The phrase τῶν εἰδώλων does not clearly indicate food that has been sacrificed to idols, yet many translators think this word has a similar content to the phrase τὸ εἰδωλόθυτον, usually translated as “meat offered to an idol.”⁴⁴ Charles H. Savelle comments that the form changed from ἀλισγημάτων τῶν εἰδώλων in 15:20 to εἰδωλοθύτων in 15:29 to clarify its meaning as “pollutions of idols.”⁴⁵ Witherington comments that the word εἰδωλόθυτον is related to ἱερόθυτον, which means meat that comes from a pagan temple or meat offered in the pagan temple. Because the pagans did not see their gods as idols, so they would never use the term “sacrificed to idol” (εἰδωλόθυτον).⁴⁶ The word εἰδωλοθύτων also appears in literature other than Acts. For example, Antiochus challenges the Hebrews, ordering “his soldiers to bring the Hebrews forward one by one and to force them to eat

“Baals” (Jer 9:14, 2 Chron 17:3 and 28:2). The word is also used as images of Chemosh, god of the Moabites, Ashtoreth, goddess of the Sidonians, and Milcom the god of the Ammonites (1 Kings 11:33). In Ezekiel, the term relates to the worship of idols with the practice of prostitution (16:16). They even sacrifice their children as acts of worship of idols (23:39). Therefore, it is a spiritual sin for the act of idolatry is an instrument of spiritual uncleanness (Ezek 36:25); see also BDAG, 221.

⁴⁰ Therefore, it can be translated as “abstain from involving the pollution of idols through participating in it.”

⁴¹ ESV and NAS translate it as “things polluted or contaminated by idols.”

⁴² NIV and NLT translate it as “food offered to” or “food polluted by idols.”

⁴³ Luke uses εἰδωλόθυτον instead of εἰδώλων.

⁴⁴ BDAG, 221.

⁴⁵ Charles H. Savelle, “A Reexamination of the Prohibitions in Acts 15,” *BSac* 161 (2004): 449-68.

⁴⁶ Ben Witherington III, *What's in the Word: Rethinking the Socio-Rhetorical Character of the New Testament* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2009), 91. Also see Ben Witherington II, “Not So Idle Thoughts about eidolothuton” in *Tyndale Bulletin* 44.2 (1993) 237- 254.

pork and meat from animals sacrificed to idols” (4 Macc 5:2, CEB).⁴⁷ One very important reason for Jews to oppose this issue strongly is that they identify eating foods offered to idols as affecting body and soul, for these things have been sacrificed to demons against Mosaic Law.⁴⁸ In the *Pseudo-Clementine Recognitions* (4.36.4): “These are the things that pollute both soul and body at the same time: to share in the table of demons, that is to eat what has been sacrificed or blood or a corpse which has been strangled, and anything else which has been offered to demons.”⁴⁹

Pseudo-Clementine concludes that what has been strangled has also been offered to demons, although this may simply be a later rationale for the inclusion of this prohibition. Therefore, some believe this prohibition is to guard against idolatry.

c. “to abstain.....*from fornication*” (τῆς πορνείας)

Πορνεία could mean sexual immorality⁵⁰ that involves prostitution, fornication, and any kind of unlawful sexual intercourse, even nonphysical mental sexual fantasy (Matt 5:22). The term includes “sexual immorality done outside of monogamous heterosexual marriage (‘adultery’ or ‘incest’) or when not married (‘fornication’) or even mental

⁴⁷ This book was written before the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

⁴⁸ See 4 Macc 4:22ff.

⁴⁹ A.J.M. Wedderburn in “The Apostolic Decree: Tradition and Redaction,” *Novum Testamentum* 4 (1993): 362-389.

⁵⁰ This section is taken from Appendix 3. In a literal sense, πορνεία means sexual immorality or any sexual activity physically or mentally outside of legal marriage (Matt 5:22). However, in the figurative sense, it also means any unfaithful acts toward the Lord. In other words, fornication is spiritual sin. In the Old Testament, the word includes actions of harlotry and lustful thinking (Gen 38:24). Sometimes it means having sexual activity which is outside of marriage (Hos 1:2, 4:12), and here the word has a spiritual meaning of longing after idols and deserting the true God. It is the cause of the spirit of harlotry in people’s heart (Hos 4:12; 5:4; Nah 3:4; Jer 13:27). In Tobit 8:7, it is written, “And now, O Lord, I take not this my sister for lust (πορνείαν) but uprightly: therefore mercifully ordain that we may become aged together.” Also, Tobit reminds the Jews that mixed marriage with non-Jews is an act leading to fornication. See BDAG, 693. Also see Aida Besancon Spencer, *1 Timothy* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2013), 32. The Hebrew word “fornication” is from the root *znh*, and can mean sexual misconduct that includes adultery, prostitution, illicit intercourse, and unfaithfulness; see Gary Hall, “fornication” in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* (Vol.1; ed. Willem A. VanGemeren; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 1123.

sexual sins such as the use of pornography or even looking at someone with lust.”⁵¹

However, figuratively, this word could mean “apostasy from God” or “idolatry.” When the prophet Hosea was called, the Lord wanted him to speak to Israel and tell them the land commits flagrant harlotry (ἐκπορνεύω).⁵² Even Paul reminds the church of Corinth to be faithful to submit to Christ. He says, “For I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ” (2 Cor. 11:2 ESV). In other words, sexual sin is compared to spiritual sin. In Tobit 8:7, Tobit reminds the Jews that mixed marriage with non-Jews is an act that is outside of God’s will, and it may lead to fornication (Tob 8:7). Parsons and Culy say, “The term πορνεία may be used to refer to various kinds of sexual immorality. Given the nature of the other kinds of behavior that are proscribed in the apostolic decree, some have argued that here πορνεία refers specifically to marriages that Jews would view as incestuous and therefore outside the will of God.”⁵³

We should ask an important question here: why does James place “fornication” among three dietary regulations? It is notable that fornication is also a moral law for Jews. Why then does James include it in the list?

Revelation 2:14 and 2:20 help us to find the answer. The word “fornication” (πορνεία) often appears together with “food sacrificed to idols” (εἰδωλόθυτον) in the New Testament. It seems that sometimes these two actions are related. Some interpreters believe that James refers to one event, which is participation in feasts of the pagan temple with immoral acts. In other words, some people in the church of Pergamum were

⁵¹ Aida Besancon Spencer, *1 Timothy* (Eugene: Cascade, 2013), 32.

⁵² Hosea 1:2.

⁵³ Parsons and Culy, *Acts*, 295. Also see James D.G. Dunn, *Beginning From Jerusalem* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 462; Dunn refers “fornication” as special reference to certain prohibited sexual unions in Lev 18.

involved in idolatrous practices by joining feasts of sacrificial meat and immoral sexual conduct. Leon Morris comments: “[these two] were usual accompaniments of the worship of idols, both in Old and New Testament times.”⁵⁴ Therefore, James’ use of the word πορνεία could mean sexual activity accompanied with pagan worship.

d. “to abstain.....*from the strangled meat*” (τοῦ πνικτοῦ)

The meaning of τοῦ πνικτοῦ should be translated as strangled animals, and those animals that were choked to death, or animals slaughtered for meat without having the blood drained from them.⁵⁵ The main concern here is connected to the blood that is still in the body; it is unlawful to eat blood, for it represents life according to the Mosaic Law (Lev 17:11,14; Deut 12:23).

e. “to abstain.....*from blood*” (τοῦ αἵματος)

The word αἷμα⁵⁶ literally means “blood of human beings,” and figuratively, it could mean murder (when it is used with “flesh,”), or animal sacrifices (Lev 4:5-7; 4:24-34; 8:15-30; 14:14-28; 16:14-19). Typologically, the blood of sacrificial animals in the Old Testament points to Christ’s blood as the fulfilment of His redemptive work (Heb 11:28).

⁵⁴ Leon Morris, *Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 67.

⁵⁵ This section is taken from Appendix 3. The word πνικτός means meats from choked, strangled or drowned animals. Also, animals that are killed for food without having the blood drained from them, or meat that has blood in it. See BDAG, 679-680.

⁵⁶ This part is taken from Appendix 3. αἷμα literally means “blood of human beings” or “blood of animals.” Figuratively, it has many meanings. It could mean murder; when it is used with “flesh,” referring to human beings. In Exodus, blood often means the blood of an unblemished lamb that typifies the blood of the Lamb of God, Christ (12:7, 22; 29:20-21; 30:10); sometimes it means the blood of animal sacrifices. The sacrificial blood could only be used for ritual services as blood of the sin offering (Ezek 45:19).

We did not find any other passage about the restriction regarding eating blood in the New Testament except in this decree (Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25). However, in the Law of Moses, this teaching is stated clearly in Leviticus 3:14-17; 17:10-16, and in Deuteronomy 12:15-16, 23-26. These passages teach the prohibition of the consumption of blood and strangled meat that had not been drained of its blood, for the blood represents life.⁵⁷

Another reason to prohibit the consumption of blood related to the first, is that God has set aside the blood for a sacred purpose (Lev 17:11); it is to be used for the atonement of life. Some scholars believe that this prohibition is directly related to God's covenant with Noah, for the Lord says, "Only you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood" (Gen 9:4). In Deuteronomy 12:2, it is written "Only be sure that you do not eat the blood, for the blood is the life, and you shall not eat the life with the flesh." Rashi's commentary on Deuteronomy indicates that the statement infers that Jewish people, influenced by Egyptians, used to eat blood.⁵⁸

The Book of Jubilees teaches strongly against shedding and eating blood based on Genesis 9 (*Jub.* 7:27-33). James VanderKam comments, "Shedding and eating blood are singled out as offenses that will lead to their being erased from the earth. Hence he [Noah] urged them to be careful with blood when sacrificing and not to eat any meat with the blood in it."⁵⁹ Therefore, the consumption of the flesh of a live animal is forbidden, and it has to be slaughtered properly.⁶⁰ Due to this concern, Jews have a particular ritual to slaughter animals for meat, which is called "Shehitah." Laws of "Shehitah," which are

⁵⁷ The Lord says to the Israelites, "For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life" (Lev 17:11).

⁵⁸ Chaim Miller ed., *Chumash - Book of Deuteronomy: With Rashi's Commentary* (New York: Kol Menachem, 2009), 93.

⁵⁹ James VanderKam, *The Book of Jubilees* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 40.

⁶⁰ Nahum M. Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 60.

the Jewish slaughtering rules, require killing animals with minimal suffering,⁶¹ and the blood of the animals must be drained before they are eaten.⁶²

The Reason for the Decree

“For Moses, since the ancient generations in every city has the ones proclaiming him, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath.”

James’ announcement does not end with four prohibitions. Actually, his speech wraps up in 15:21 with the conjunction “for” to continue his final point. The role of the conjunction γάρ (“for”) is to express cause or to explain the preceding thought.⁶³ It is quite reasonable that verse 21 is the reason for those prohibitions.

James wants to explain that since the ancient generations, Moses already taught them about worshipping God on every Sabbath. Therefore, no matter in which city they live, Jews will gather in the synagogues to listen to God’s laws. Thus, it is reasonable to say that James provides a proposal by which the Gentile believers may avoid unnecessary tensions due to certain sensitive cultural issues. We must pay attention to these three phrases: “ancient generations,” “every city,” and “every Sabbath.” The phrase “since the ancient generations” is stressed by being placed early in the sentence. James wants to tell them that Jews have been observing Mosaic Law since ancient times, for many generations. The phrase “every city” means Moses’ teaching is widespread; it is in every city. The phrase “every Sabbath” identifies the frequency of observing the teaching; every Sabbath, they meet in the synagogue and learn the Law of Moses. Schnabel

⁶¹ Adele Berlin, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 627; Neusner, *Dictionary of Judaism*, 231.

⁶² Neusner, *Dictionary of Judaism*, 231.

⁶³ Daniel B. Wallace, *The Basics of the New Testament Syntax* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 294.

explains, “The statement that the law is read and explained ‘in every city’ every Sabbath obviously refers to cities that had a Jewish community.”⁶⁴ Therefore, it is a good reminder to the Gentile believers to be sensitive to the Jewish believers, as well as to their culture.

G. Some Related Issues in Jewish Background

Jews are a religious community. God has called them out of Egypt in order that they may worship Him (Exod 3:12; 4:23; 7:16), and God would make them to be a holy nation and kingdom of priests (Exod 19:6). God has commanded them to worship Him only and to live purely. For ancient Jews, there were two main ideas about purity and impurity: one was related to cultic matters, and the other related to sexual immorality or unethical action.⁶⁵ Therefore, it is quite possible this is the reason that the council of Jerusalem lists four prohibitions closely associated to these two ideas. The issue of “things of the defilement of idols” is considered as falling under the first category (a cultic matter), and “strangled meat” and “blood” can also be considered in this category. However, “sexual immorality” falls into the second category (an ethical matter).

In postexilic times, any non-Jewish worship was considered idolatry, and even the title “idolater” referred to one who was non-Jewish.⁶⁶ Jacob Neusner explains “The rejection of idolatry was such a central distinguishing mark between Jew and non-Jew that a Gentile who renounced idolatry could be called a Jew.”⁶⁷ The teaching forbidding idolatry was the central teaching of Jewish culture due to many threats in their past. The

⁶⁴ E. Schnabel, *Acts*, 646.

⁶⁵ Jacob Neusner, *The Idea of Purity in Ancient Judaism* (New York: Brill Academic, 1973), 108.

⁶⁶ Jacob Neusner, ed., *Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1999), 307.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

destruction their great king, Solomon, led the country into was due to this very sin (1 Kings 11:4). As a result of that background, Jewish teaching tried to prevent any connection with idolatry. In *b. Sanh* 56a, it is written, “ Our Rabbis taught: Seven precepts were the sons of Noah commanded -social laws, to refrain from blasphemy, idolatry, adultery, bloodshed, robbery, and eating flesh cut from a living animal.”⁶⁸ In the Mishnah, there are many places which mention the issues of “strangled meat” and “blood” (*m. Yoma* 5:6; *m. Mak.* 3:2; *m. Hul.* 1:1; 2:1; *m. Ker.* 1:1; *m. Tohor.* 1:1).⁶⁹

In *m. Abodah Zarah* (2.6), there are found very “long lists of foods and animal products that may not be sold to or bought from a Gentile, lest they are to be used in idolatry.”⁷⁰ Because of that reason, Jews set a very strict rule around this issue; as we have seen, even eating the food from the temple would be considered as part of the act of idolatry. Also in Christian literature, *Did.* 6.3, eating of food offered to idols was even identified as the worship of dead gods.

H. Conclusion

In summary, this chapter leads us to see more clearly that Luke’s presentation of the Apostolic Decree is to confirm that the gospel is for both Jew and Gentile. James’ decision is not his personal opinion but his exposition of the prophecy of Amos 9:11-12 based on Peter, and on Paul and Barnabas’ testimonies (Acts 15:16-18). An official letter is written and sent to Gentle Christians of Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia for affirming the teaching of salvation by grace alone and through faith alone, yet it requires them to

⁶⁸ *Hebrew-English Edition of The Babylonian Talmud – Sanhedrin* (ed. I. Epstein, trans. Jacob Shachter and H. Freedman; London: Soncino, 1969).

⁶⁹ Craig Evans, *Ancient Texts for New Testament Studies* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 377.

⁷⁰ Neusner, *Dictionary of Judaism*, 308.

abstain from things that are defiled by idols, from fornication, from strangled meat, and from blood. The study shows that these four prohibitions cannot be interpreted in a literal sense.

The analysis of the original text shows that “strangled meat” may be defined as animals slaughtered without having the blood drained from them, and eating them is unlawful because blood represents life according to Mosaic law. “Blood” indicates “blood of human beings,” “blood of animals” or “blood that is in meat”; the word is a reminder of the commandment of not murdering, and of Jewish tradition of prohibiting from eating blood and meat containing blood.

From our analysis of its socio-historical background, we discover that these prohibitions are related to the contemporary pagan culture. “Idol food,” “fornication,” “strangled meat” and “blood” are affiliated with the rituals of pagan worship. Moreover, “strangled meat” and “blood” refer to pagan delicacies, and these two terms may point to “murder.” If the Judaism of the time saw “idolatry, illicit sexuality and bloodshed”⁷¹ as three cardinal sins, we may understand “these prohibitions presumably represent the minimum ethical standard Hellenistic Jews required of proselytes, which the decree adopts for Gentile converts to Christianity.”⁷²

The study of the context of Acts 15:19-20 shows that James’ determination must be interpreted within the contexts of Acts 15:16-18 (pre-text) and 15:21 (post-text). The former context is related to Moses’ law for Gentile sojourners who lived among Israelites in Leviticus 17-18, and it was common knowledge for all Gentile sojourners. Therefore, it must not be applied as a normative teaching in today’s society. Also, the context of

⁷¹ Peter J. Tomson, *Paul and the Jewish Law: Halakha in the Letters of the Apostle to the Gentiles* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 179.

⁷² Cheung, *Idol Food in Corinth*, 178.

Acts 15: 21 is James' reminder to Gentile believers to be sensitive to Mosaic law that had been practiced by Jews for generations. In other words, these prohibitions are a pragmatic compromise and a reminder of the continuity of the authority of the Bible.⁷³

The study of Acts 15:19-20 shows that “strangled meat” and “blood” are related to pagan religious belief and pagan delicacies. To abstain from “strangled meat” and “blood” is to promote unity and peace between Jewish and Gentile Christians, and the teaching of these abstinences is only temporary and local. Yet we have another issue to clarify: does Paul's teaching⁷⁴ align with the Apostolic Decree? Seemingly, Paul's teaching on these texts confuses some due to the inconsistency to the Apostolic Decree. We will investigate this difficult issue in the next chapter, and the investigation includes a study of the historical background of these texts, their setting and their consistency with the Apostolic Decree. Through this study, we want to see whether Paul's view aligns with the Apostolic Decree.

⁷³ Bauckham, “James and the Jerusalem Church,” 464.

⁷⁴ This teaching includes 1 Corinthians 8-10, Galatians 2, and Romans 14-15.

CHAPTER 3

THE PROHIBITIONS AND PAUL’S EPISTLES

Introduction

In this chapter, we will discuss the prohibitions of the Apostolic Decree in Acts 15:20 and the related issues in Paul’s epistles, especially in Galatians 2, 1 Corinthians 8-10 and Romans 14-15. Some readers may be confused due to the apparent inconsistency between the decree and Paul’s teachings regarding permission for eating food offered to idols. Michael Shen comments that the stipulation against idol food in the Apostolic Decree causes some to suspect the reliability of Luke’s writing of Acts, due to the inconsistency with Paul’s permissible view in 1 Corinthians 8:1-11:1.¹

Did Paul change his view after the Council of Jerusalem? Should we adjust our previous interpretation if Paul’s view differs from James’ declaration in the Apostolic Decree? Is Paul’s view in his epistles more popular than James’ view? Whom should we follow, Paul or James? Of course, Paul did not change his view, nor his view is more popular than James. How do we know that? This chapter is to show whether or not Paul’s teaching aligns with the Apostolic Decree.

A. Paul’s Teaching in Galatians 2

1. Brief Historical Background of Letter of Galatians

Many believe Galatians is the first book that Paul wrote, and that he wrote it after his first mission with Barnabas to the region of Galatia. Their first station in Galatia was

¹ Michael Li-Tak Shen, “Paul’s Doctrine of God and the Issues of Food Offered to Idols in 1 Corinthians 8:1-11:1.” (Ph.D. diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 2003).

Antioch of Pisidia, where Paul preached a long sermon (Acts 13:16-41) and many Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas (13:43). Yet some of the Jews were jealous to see that very many went to Paul and Barnabas, and so they opposed Paul and Barnabas by slandering them. Then Paul and Barnabas shifted their ministry to the Gentiles, who were rejoicing and glorifying God while hearing Paul and Barnabas' preaching (13:48). Paul and Barnabas fled to Iconium, then to Lystra and Derbe due to the persecution, and they led a great number of both Jews and Greeks to become believers (14:6-22). No matter where they went, they were facing persecution. Later they headed back through the same route, visiting each city on the way back to the sending church, Antioch of Syria.

Paul's first mission journey had expanded the church into foreign regions, and many Jews of the diaspora as well as Gentiles came to the Lord. Therefore, the composition of the Galatian congregation was quite mixed; it consisted of Jews and Gentiles, including some Jews who were ardently devoted to traditional Judaism. In this very early stage of Christianity, it was quite natural that conflict arose due to different cultures and religious backgrounds. A very practical issue was before them: Jewish Christians came to the difficult moment where they had to dine with Gentile Christians, with whom they had never had the experience to do so.² Unfortunately, these Jewish Christians not merely had to face emotional struggles, but also pressure from the unbelieving Jewish community.

During that era, Christianity was viewed as "a sectarian group within Judaism."³ Due to this reason, many Jews, and probably even the Gentile converts, believed that keeping

² I. Howard Marshall, Stephen Travis and Ian Paul, *Exploring the New Testament: A Guide to Letters and Revelation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 48.

³ Ibid. 47.

Jewish law was something reasonable to do as followers of this Jewish Messiah. Craig L. Blomberg writes, “Requiring circumcision in fact amounted to the demand that Gentiles (or even God-fearers) must keep all of the law, in essence becoming Jews first *en route* to becoming Christians, since for many adult men that was the final step in full conversion to Judaism. Had this approach been widely adopted, Christianity might never have been more than another Jewish sect.”⁴ It is hard to contemplate that some Jewish believers taught that Gentile Christians had to follow the Mosaic Law. Among the Galatians, three main critical issues that the law-observing Jewish believers cared about were circumcision, observance of Jewish festivals, and Jewish dietary laws.⁵ In addition, it was more difficult for Jewish Christians, for they were constantly living under the pressure of the influence of non-Christian Jews.⁶ Once, Peter, Barnabas and other Jewish believers were eating with Gentile Christians, and then withdrew themselves from the table fellowship due to the arrival of certain men sent from James. Nevertheless, Paul opposed Peter to his face, for he was not acting in line with the truth of the gospel (Gal 2:11-14). Paul wrote this letter with sadness and disappointment, for he had seen that they had left the essential truth of the gospel of grace; the essential truth of this gospel is that we are saved by grace alone (Gal 2:16).

2. *The Debates on the Issues of Dating and Destination*

By looking at the contents of Acts 15 and Galatians 2, we see many similarities, especially in regard to subject matter, the participants involved, and the outcome of the

⁴ Craig Blomberg, *From Pentecost to Patmos* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2006), 51-52.

⁵ Marshall, Travis, Paul, *Exploring the New Testament*, 48.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 52.

meetings.⁷ Scholars have debated for years about the relationship of Acts 15 and Galatians 2. One group says these two passages are the same event, while another group claims these two passages record two separate events. The first view will lead into a much later dating for Galatians, or suspicion regarding the reliability of Acts.

The main two theories are the North Galatian and the South Galatian theory. The former believe states that Paul's letter was directed to the congregations of northern Galatia, and that the title of "Galatian" is derived from Latin '*galli*' which refers to Celtic tribes.⁸ Some also observe that "the fickle and superstitious character of Galatians suits a Gallic origin."⁹ Therefore, this letter must have been written after Paul's first missionary journey (chs.13-14) and after the Jerusalem Council (ch.15).¹⁰ However, the opposing theory claims that the events which happened in Acts 13-14 clearly describe the southern region of Galatia. Maybe Paul wrote this letter to the congregations in southern Galatia.

According to Galatians 4:13, Paul appears to have visited Galatia twice. This verse helps the North Galatian theory proponents believing that the date could be even after Acts 18:23. However, Ronald Y.K. Fung explains that Paul's two visits could refer to the eastward direction of his first missionary journey and its westward-returning direction.¹¹ David Wenham, who holds with the South Galatian Theory, lists several problems with

⁷ David Wenham, "Acts and the Pauline Corpus: II. Pauline Parallels" in *The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting* (vol. 1 of *The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting*, ed. Bruce W. Winter; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 242.

⁸ Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatia* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 1-3.

⁹ D.A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 460-461.

¹⁰ Ronald Y.K. Fung, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 9.

¹¹ Fung explains, "the letter could have written any time after the close of the first missionary journey, if the Greek expression in Galatians 4:13 means, as it could, no more than 'originally, at first.' If it is construed as implying two visits, these could be identified as Paul's initial visit on the first missionary journey to the Galatian churches in an eastward direction, and the subsequent visit on the same journey when he retraced his steps in the opposite direction (Acts 14:21)" (*Galatians*, 9).

the North Galatian Theory: (1) Galatians does not mention the ruling from the Jerusalem meeting, and besides, the meeting with James occurred in a private setting; (2) the main purpose of writing Galatians is to defend Paul's apostleship; and (3) the record of Paul's two visits in Galatians 2 is equivalent to Acts 11.¹² Moreover, John Calvin comments that if Paul rebuked Peter at Antioch before being sent to the council of Jerusalem, Galatians must be written before Acts 15. Otherwise, Paul could have mentioned the decision to his readers, the Galatians.¹³ Another strong point in defense of the South Galatian theory is that the presence of Barnabas in the letter indicates an early dating; Barnabas left Paul after the Council of Jerusalem.

The above rationale shows us that the South Galatian theory seems to be more persuasive in relation to the chronological order of Paul's mission than the North Galatian theory. The purpose of studying the date of Galatians is to make a connection between the events of the false teaching in Galatians, and the confusion that same group brought to Antioch. Therefore, we believe Galatians was written before the Council of Jerusalem, and it is quite possible that those who taught false teachings to the Galatians were the same ones who caused confusion for the church while Paul and Barnabas were in Antioch (Acts 15:1-2).

3. *The Issue of Keeping Mosaic Law*

After Paul left that region, the false teachers tried to force Gentile believers to be circumcised and to keep certain laws in order to be saved. They "saw Christianity as a

¹² David Wenham and Steve Walton, *Exploring the New Testament: Gospels & Acts* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2011), 305.

¹³ Gerald L. Bray, ed., *Reformation Commentary on Scripture: Galatians, Ephesians* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2011), 4.

modified Judaism, they were teaching that to be in covenant relationship to God means to submit to the way of the law.”¹⁴ Paul’s main target was to direct them to the truth of justification by faith alone, not by keeping the law, with its requirements of circumcision, Jewish festivals and dietary laws. Obviously, this teaching was similar to the one of the Jerusalem Council, for Paul wrote to bring them back to the heart of the gospel of justification by faith; God’s grace is not accomplished by keeping the law (1:6-7; 2:16).

To conclude this section, let us relate Galatians to Acts 15. Both books teach the same message of justification by faith, not through observing Mosaic Law as the requirement for salvation. Thomas Schreiner comments, “if Galatians submit to circumcision, they cut themselves off from Christ and Salvation, for they remove themselves from the only means by which they can be forgiven of their sins.”¹⁵ Therefore, Paul’s teaching in Galatians is aligned with the Apostolic Decree.

B. Paul’s Teaching in 1 Corinthians 8-10

1. *Brief Historical Background of Letter of 1 Corinthians*

During his second missionary journey Paul founded a church in Corinth, the capital of the Province of Achaia.¹⁶ “Roman Corinth was prosperous, cosmopolitan, and religiously pluralistic, accustomed to visits by impressive, travelling public speakers and obsessed with status, self-promotion, and personal rights. From Jewish or Christian viewpoint, as with any pagan city, its inhabitants were marked by the worship of idols, sexual

¹⁴ D.A. Carson and D. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 466.

¹⁵ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 310.

¹⁶ Donald Engels, *Roman Corinth: An Alternative Model for the Classical City* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1990), 44.

immorality, and greed.”¹⁷ In July of 1929, for example, inscriptions in Corinth mentioning Apollo were found in the Temple of Apollo. The inscription says, "To [- - -], priest of [- -] and priest of the Tutela Augusta. The colony awarded a golden crown [- ----]."¹⁸ John Kent comments, “this is the first inscription from Corinth which shows that a cult to the Tutela Augusta existed in that city; most of the inscriptions which have to do with this and similar cults have been found either in Rome or in Spain.”¹⁹ There are many inscriptions related to the dedication of Roman emperors deified as gods. In March of 1926, a fragment was found which says *divo Ivlio Caesar [sacrum]*, which means, “[Sacred] to the deified Julius Caesar.”²⁰ Four fragments were found in March 1936 and May 1938,²¹ which read *divo Augusto sacrum*, which means, “[Sacred to] the deified Augustus.”²² In the records of Josephus, Herod built shrines for the dedication of Caesar Augustus and emperor worship.²³ Even in the Domitian empire, “Christians also faced charges of ‘atheism’: in the context of Domitian’s actions against aristocrats and suspicious relatives, and in the context of the imperial cult in which the Christians refused to be involved.”²⁴

During Paul’s mission to this city, many pagans came to Christ through his ministry, and these Gentile converts were new in the faith and facing many challenges from the surrounding pagan culture. After Paul left Corinth, he heard many issues had been raised

¹⁷ Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 3.

¹⁸ John Harvey Kent, *Corinth, Volume 8, Part 3: The Inscriptions, 1926 -1950* (Princeton: American School of Classical Studies at Athens, 1966), 86.

¹⁹ Kent, *Corinth*, 86.

²⁰ Kent, *Corinth*, 31 (1. 8., inv. 2178.)

²¹ Kent, *Corinth*, 32 (1. 8., inv. 1679.)

²² Kent, 86.

²³ Josephus, *Jewish Wars*, 1.407.

²⁴ Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission. Volume 1* (Downers Grove: IVP Press, 2004), 573.

among these new converts, such as division (1 Cor 3), fornication (1 Cor 5), idol-food and conscience (1 Cor 8-10), problems in worship order and spiritual gifts (1 Cor 11-14), and doubt of the certainty of the resurrection (1 Cor 15). Then Paul wrote 1 Corinthians from Ephesus in order to correct any misunderstandings and to comfort them.

2. *The Setting of 1 Corinthians 8 and 10*

1 Corinthians 8-10 forms a modified chiasm in ABB'A' pattern.²⁵ It is taken from Charles T. Talbert's outline,²⁶ as follows:

- A. Two issues - (1) and (2) (8:1-13)
- B. The example of Paul - apostolic freedom and slavery (9:1-23)
- B'. The examples of Paul and Israel - necessity of self-control (9:24-10:13)
- A'. Two issues - (2) and (1) (10:14-11:1)

The two main issues are of "eating meat" that was killed or offered in a pagan temple and "participating in a feast" in a pagan temple. When Paul addresses the issue of food offered to idols (εἰδωλόθυτον), he uses a word that is derived from the combination εἶδωλον (idol) and θυτος (verbal adjective meaning to sacrifice).²⁷ However, Paul's intention was to deal with the danger of an abusive attitude toward Christian liberty. Some who had knowledge about the nonexistence of idols had eaten food offered to idols, heedless of those who were weak in the faith. Indeed, Paul held a permissible position on the issue of eating food offered to idols, for he believed that idols were not really gods, and that only the God of the Scriptures was the true God, who was the

²⁵ Michael Li-Tak Shen, *Canaan to Corinth: Paul's Doctrine of God and the Issue of Food Offered to Idols* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), 138.

²⁶ Charles T. Talbert, *Reading Corinthians: A Literary and Theological Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (New York: Crossroad, 1987), 56; in Talbert's outline, issue (1) is "the question of eating meat, originally killed or offered in a pagan temple," and issue (2) is "the matter of eating at the table in an idol's temple."

²⁷ A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament: The Epistles of Paul (vol. 4)* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1972), 137.

Creator of all things (1 Cor 8:4-6). However, Paul warned the Corinthians to “take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak” (1 Cor 8:9 ESV). It is good to have knowledge about the emptiness of idols and a right knowledge of Christian liberty. However, this knowledge must be accompanied by a practice of love. Roy Ciampa and Brian Rosner comment that “The ‘knowledgeable’ Corinthians do not realize that they are in danger of leading other believers to commit subjective idolatry and that they themselves are in danger of committing objective idolatry despite their touted knowledge of monotheism.”²⁸ Paul uses βλέπετε as an imperative verb to command them to be careful not to place a stumbling block to cause others to fall. Later, he uses even stronger language to remind them that it is a sin against Christ if they wound the conscience of the weak brothers and sisters (1 Cor 8:12). Out of love to his brothers and sisters and to the Lord, Paul chooses rather not to eat the food if he knows eating will cause others to stumble (8:13). That is why Alex Cheung believes that Paul’s argument in this passage is to lead people to practice love.²⁹

In 1 Corinthians 10:1-13, which is part B’ of the outline, Paul’s language changes to be more negative on this issue. What is the reason that Paul shifted his position from permissible to impermissible? Actually, Paul did not change his view, but he spoke about the same issue from a different context. Paul was talking about the worship of idols and the eating of the meals associated with idols. Paul warned them to flee (φεύγετε) from the worship of idols and from eating idol-meals, for worshipping idols and participating in

²⁸ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 369. The following are their definitions; “By ‘subjective idolatry’ we mean an occasion when a person consciously participates in an activity that they consider idolatrous. Whether or not others judge it to be so may be beside the point. By ‘objective idolatry’ we mean those not themselves idolaters (they do not believe in idols or other gods) who participate in an activity that they consider innocent but which in fact is idolatrous.”

²⁹ Alex Cheung, *Idol Food in Corinth* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 116-7.

the meals would associate them with the worship of demons. In 1 Corinthians 10:7, Paul recalls and relates his argument to the history of faith: during Moses' time, Israelites worshipped idols, ate the food offered to idols, and engaged in sexual immorality, and God showed His judgment toward those disobedient generations (Num 25). Paul's purpose for bringing this history into view was to let them see that idolatry was particularly complex and actually involved sexual immorality. "The call to 'flee sexual immorality' in 6:18 is matched by a comparable call to 'flee idolatry' in 10:14. The temple imagery of 6:19-20 is also suggestive. Paul could be saying, 'Don't go to the temple (to use prostitutes); you are the temple.' The juxtaposition of sexual immorality and idolatry in 10:7-8 likewise takes on new significance if read in the light of the presence of sacred prostitution in Corinth."³⁰ Therefore, we can say the abstinence from idol-food in the Decree of the Council of Jerusalem could mean more than just eating the idol-food itself, but also implies the involvement of prostitution.

Worshipping idols, eating the feast meal, and having sexual immorality were interrelated in ancient times. In Revelation 2:14 and 2:20, Christ warned both the churches in Pergamum and Thyatira against eating the food offered to idols and committing sexual immorality. That means that some members of the churches of Pergamum and Thyatira did not totally put off their old pagan practices, or that they were syncretizing Christian practices with pagan culture that was influenced by Balaam's teaching, the Nicolaitans, and the prophetess Jezebel. These two words, namely εἰδωλόθυτον and πορνεύω, appear together again in this passage in Revelation. Greg Beale comments that the word "fornicate" can mean both spiritual and physical

³⁰ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 248-49.

fornication. In Balaam's account, Israelites fornicated with daughters of Moab and worshipped their gods at Peor.³¹ In other words, some in Pergamum and Thyatira were involved in idolatrous practices by joining feasts of sacrificial meat and engaging in immoral sexual conduct. Leon Morris comments, "[these two] were usual accompaniments of the worship of idols, both in Old and New Testament times."³² In Revelation 2, Christ's warning was to prohibit their going to pagan temples and joining these events.³³ So we may say that some believers, who followed the false teachings, continued to practice their former pagan lifestyles and worship, and yet still came to worship God. Therefore, the church had been impacted or pressured badly by the influence of syncretism, and some had compromised with worldly teaching and the Roman pattern. Richard Bauckham says, "it is not merely a concept of Christian syncretism to pagan society, it led Christians to the denial of the true God and His righteousness which characterizes the forces of evils incarnate in the Roman system."³⁴

Although the idols mean nothing, the spirits behind these idols are demons (1 Cor 10:18-19). Paul rhetorically asks, "What do I imply then? That food offered to idols (εἰδωλόθυτόν) is anything, or that an idol is anything?" (1Cor 10:19 ESV). Paul answers, "No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons" (1Cor 10:20 ESV). Paul strictly warns Corinthians that Christians are not to participate with demons, for the Lord is a jealous God (10:20-21). Therefore, Paul says that the food offered to idols was not totally meaningless if the participants had joined themselves in the pagan worship and feast.

³¹ Greg. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 250.

³² Leon Morris, *Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 67.

³³ Ben Witherington III, *Revelation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 103.

³⁴ Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 124.

Shen believes the existence of demons is real, for he says “Paul’s only usage of διαμονιον outside of 1 Corinthians confirms the personal, deceptive and destructive nature of the work of demons (1 Tim 4:1).”³⁵ In other words, the content of Chapter 10 is not merely about eating idol-food, but also the participation in worshipping of pagan gods while eating the idol-food.

In 1 Corinthians 10:14-33 (A’),³⁶ Paul brings his audience back to another context, which is similar to Chapter 8 (A). Here Paul discussed the meat sold in the market, and said we might eat any meat that is sold in the marketplace without raising questions of conscience, because “the earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it” (10:25-26). Paul raised an example that we might eat whatever is offered to idols, unless someone told us so. Then, we had to stop eating it; it was for the conscience of that person, not for one’s own conscience.

In summary, Chapters 8 and 10 of 1 Corinthians provide some details about the abstinences in Acts 15. In the Apostolic Decree, the prohibition of eating idol-food could be more than the idol-food itself, but it might also relate to participation in worshipping idols. In the same manner, the prohibition of fornication that is mentioned in Acts 15 is related to worshipping pagan gods that involved temple prostitution. Therefore, we also have to conclude that Paul’s view of eating idol food and fornication is aligned with the teaching of the Apostolic Decree.

³⁵ Shen, *Canaan to Corinth*, 76.

³⁶ The A’ in the outline is 1 Cor 10:14-11:1.

C. Paul's Teaching in Romans 14 -15

1. *Brief Historical Background of Letter of Romans*

The church of Rome had existed before Paul's arrival at Rome, and before he wrote the Epistle to the Romans. Many believe that the first group of Christians began from Pentecost, and these converts brought the Gospel to Rome (Acts 2:10). In the beginning of this letter, Paul was thankful for the testimony of their faith, and that through them the Gospel had been proclaimed throughout the world (Rom 1:8). About A.D. 41, Emperor Claudius declared an edict to drive out the Jews in Rome.³⁷ C.K. Barrett comments, "Since the Jews constantly made disturbances at the instigations of *Chrestus*, he expelled them from Rome."³⁸

Paul wrote this letter from Corinth during his third missionary journey, around A.D. 57, and he was hoping that one day he could travel to Rome and then to Spain (Rom 15:22-24). Under God's special design, Paul was brought in chains to Rome in A.D. 59. He first met with the Christians there (Acts 28:14), then witnessed with all boldness to Jews and especially the local leaders of the Jewish community during his two-year imprisonment in Rome (Acts 28:17-31). Of those who came, some were convicted by Paul's preaching.

Many Jews lived in the capital city of the Roman Empire. There were about forty to fifty thousand Jews and thirteen Jewish synagogues in Rome,³⁹ and some of these Jews were believers in Jesus Christ. Among the final greetings of his letter to Rome (Rom 16:1-16), Paul named people he knew, and there were "several names given there of

³⁷ *Dio Cassius Hist.* 60.6.

³⁸ C.K. Barrett, *New Testament Background* (New York: HarperOne, 1995), 15.

³⁹ Ralph P. Martin, *New Testament Foundation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 188.

emancipated slaves and freedmen.”⁴⁰ In other words, the membership of the church was a mixture of different social status, ethnic backgrounds, and religious backgrounds. Ralph Martin comments, “it is clear that chapters 14 and 15 [show us] a divided church and painful divergences within the life of the community, disfiguring the image of the body of Christ.”⁴¹

2. *The Setting of Romans 14-15*

Besides writing this letter as a preparation to visit Rome and Spain, Paul wanted to answer tough questions and refute the wrong teachings of the false teachers.⁴² A broad outline of the book can be divided into two main sections: section 1, the foundational teaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ (chs.1-11); and section 2, applications of the teaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ (chs.12-16). Obeying the civil government, observing Jewish law and dietary rules, and loving others are some practical issues of the church. Paul tackled those issues by directing them to the foundational teaching of the Gospel of grace. Martin comments, “[Paul] reproduces specimen arguments for and expositions of his theological position concerning the way of salvation by divine grace, to be received by faith, without observance of the law as merit-conferring system.”⁴³ Actually, Paul did not reject the important existence and role of the law; he directed his audience to see that Christ’s finished work on the cross had fulfilled the requirement of the law (Rom 3:21; 10:4). His message was to lead them to see that God had provided the good news to Jews and to Gentiles since God created the world, and this good news was

⁴⁰ Ibid., 189.

⁴¹ Ibid., 191.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

fulfilled through Christ's work (Rom 1:16-20; 3:20-24) . Therefore, to be saved through believing Jesus Christ is a free gift of God; it is not by keeping the law (Rom 3:19-20; 5:1).

The main topic of Chapter 14 is the warning against criticism. Paul reminded those who are strong not to judge the weak one (ἀσθενοῦντα) in faith, but to receive him. Paul also used the same word in 1 Corinthians 8:7-12 to remind those who had knowledge not to use their privilege to cause others with a weaker conscience to stumble. However, in Romans 14 the issue was about eating meat versus vegetables, and Paul used two imperative words to remind them “not to despise” and “not to judge.” Judging others is like putting a stumbling block to cause others to fall.⁴⁴

It is quite possible that the unclean food is about meat offered to idols (εἰδωλόθυτον). In other words, believers in Rome had a similar issue of eating or not eating idol meat as that recorded in 1 Corinthians 8. However, Paul also mentions that nothing is unclean in itself, but he urges them to put aside their privileges in relation to eating meat for the sake of not causing someone else to stumble (Rom 14:20). The remedy that Paul provides goes back to the message of the Gospel; for as God has received each one of them into His kingdom, so they must receive one another just as Christ has received them (Rom 15:7). For Paul, those who were strong had an obligation to bear with the shortcomings of the weak by putting aside their own preferences (Rom 15:1). Therefore, in regard to the issue of food regulations, or what is clean or unclean, Paul holds out a similar principle as in 1 Corinthians 8 and 10; practicing love to others rather than emphasizing one's personal food preferences, for Christ has already fulfilled all laws. The study of Romans 14-15

⁴⁴ Robertson, *The Epistles of Paul* (vol. 4), 414.

shows that Paul agrees with the resolution of the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 that proclaims Christ's sufficiency in His work on the Cross.

Analysis of the Three Texts

The main message of Galatians is to direct us to see the fundamental teaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ; nobody, neither Jews nor Gentiles alike, can be justified by works of the Law, but are rather justified through faith in Jesus Christ (Gal 2:16). Therefore, the Gentile converts become like Jewish Christians, and they too are justified by grace through faith, not by observing the law. We believe that Paul's message to the Galatians is the same as that of James; James' conclusion of the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:19-21) is to reaffirm the Gospel of grace alone, and the decree is unifying for Jewish Christians and Gentile believers through reducing the obstacles of fellowship.

For 1 Corinthians 8-10, the message concerns the issue of knowledge and love. According to Paul, the Corinthians might know that idols were nothing, and that food that was offered to idols was nothing. However, Paul reminded them to be aware of those who are weaker in faith; the stronger ones should not practice their freedom without considering others. Paul's message was to lead them to a deeper consideration, which was "love." Therefore, he repeatedly warned them to consider, or to benefit others, although they did have privileges. Loving others meant setting aside one's rights and putting others before oneself; loving others meant doing all things for the glory of the Lord, not for himself or herself (1 Cor 10:31). Besides emphasizing the message of loving others, Paul also helps us see the actuality of involvement in worshipping pagan gods and its relationship with fornication or practicing prostitution. In addition, Ciampa and Rosner

show us that temple worship in 1 Corinthians 10 is related to fornication in 1 Corinthians 6, which explains that the prohibition of fornication in the decree of the council could be related to temple prostitution during the feast. Through this study, we have a clearer understanding of the background of the abstinences from idol-food and fornication in the Apostolic Decree.

The main message of Romans 14 -15 is about unity in the church. Some scholars see Paul as trying to reconcile between the strong and the weak.⁴⁵ With logical and persuasive writing, Paul presented his argument by stressing God's plan of salvation for both Jews and Gentiles (chs.1-11). This salvation was first to Jews, then to the Gentiles. God's redemptive history started since the fall of humanity. God's original covenant of grace was fulfilled through Christ's work (Rom 5:14-18). Jews and Gentiles were the same now before God, and all had to believe in Christ in order to be justified. Therefore, in the practical section of the letter, namely chapters 12 to 15, Paul urges them to serve together in one body, and let no issue such as food preferences due to dietary laws split the church. Ben Witherington III and Darlene Hyatt comment that Paul's purpose in reminding them is to have peace and a unified spirit in the church.⁴⁶

In conclusion, an analysis of these three passages helps us in two areas. First, it helps us clarify the issue of "eating idol food" and "the relationship of fornication and pagan worship." Second, it testifies that Paul's view toward the four prohibitions in the Apostolic Decree is not different from James' since they both acknowledge that all are saved by grace through faith, not by observing the Law of Moses.

⁴⁵ Michael F. Bird, "The Letter to the Romans," in *All Things to All Cultures* (eds. Mark Harding and Alanna Nobbs; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 187.

⁴⁶ Ben Witherington III and Darlene Hyatt, *Paul's Letter to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 327.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS AND APPLICATION OF THE ISSUES OF ABSTINENCE FROM “STRANGLED MEAT” AND “BLOOD”

Introduction

This section will focus on two main parts. First will be a comparative study of the various scholars’ interpretations and our own exegetical work regarding “strangled meat” and “blood.” The second concerns practical implications of the text in today’s churches, especially in the Chinese or Asian context.

A. Analysis of Scholars’ Interpretations

From the summary in Chapter 1, we see that there are two major groups of interpretation over the issues of “strangled meat” and “eating blood.” The first group holds the impermissible position, which is also the normative view, while the second group holds the permissible position. In this section, we will make an analysis of the scholars’ interpretations, a comparative study of the analysis, and the implications of our exegetical work.

1. The Impermissible Position on Strangled Meat and Eating Blood

When we analyze chronologically the perspectives of various scholars in Chapter 1 from the intertestamental period to today, we discover two reasons given by those who hold the impermissible position: (1) It is related to rituals of pagan worship, and (2) It is a continued teaching of the Scriptures in Genesis 9:4, Leviticus 11, 17-18 and Deuteronomy 12. Figure 3 gives a brief analysis of the scholars who hold this view.

Philo and Origen believe that “strangled meat or animals” and “blood” are closely related to a pagan sacrifice¹ and demon worship.² Certainly, it is forbidden to participate in this kind of ritual.

Scholars	Rationale			Remarks
	Pagan Worship	Noahic Covenant	Mosaic Law	
Tertullian		NS ³	NS	See <i>Apol.</i> 9:13
Justin Martyr		X		See <i>Dial.</i> 20
Origen	X	X		See <i>Celsus</i> 8.30
Peter Walpot		X		Peter Walpot is considered to have the same view.
J.W. McGarvey		X		
A. Yehoshua ⁴	X			Jews and Gentiles must keep it.
J. Coffman ⁵ & G. Woods		X	X	
Chinese S1 ⁶		X	X	They believe the decree is the continuation of Mosaic law.
Chinese S2 ⁷		X	X	They tend to believe the decree is for table fellowship of the church.

Figure 3. The Analysis of the Impermissible View Presented in Chronological Order

Another group of scholars, who hold the impermissible view, believe abstinence from the things is the continued teaching of the scriptures from Genesis 9, Leviticus 11, 17-18, and Deuteronomy 12. Church Fathers, such as Tertullian, Justin Martyr, and Origen, hold this view. It is noteworthy to state that Origen believes abstinence from both “strangled meat/animals” and “blood” in the Apostolic Decree is a continued teaching of Noahic

¹ Philo, *Spec. Leg* 4.122

² Origen, *Celsus*. 8.30

³ Legend: NS= not specified; X=agreed with the issue

⁴ Avram Yehoshua, *The Lifting of the Veil*, 146.

⁵ Coffman sees the commandment of abstinence is neither from Moses’ law nor from Noah’s, but from the authority of the Holy Spirit; Coffman, *Acts*, 300.

⁶ S1 means Group 1 of Chinese Scholars/Ministers, such as Watchman Nee, Caleb Huang, and Jun-Lan Dong. They strongly oppose the permissible view and believe that the prohibition is normative.

⁷ S2 means Group 2 of Chinese Scholars/Ministers. They are Jun-Yi Lu, Vincent Cheung, Yu-Ming Chia, John H.H. Su, .T. Chen, and Grant Chen. They do not clearly state their position, yet their position is leaning toward the impermissible position. They see the purpose of James’ decree is for the good of Jewish Christian and Gentile believers.

law,⁸ and he also believes the act of “eating strangled meat” or “blood” is related to worshipping demons. Peter Walpot, a Radical Reformer, believes these prohibitions were commanded to all peoples since Noah’s time. J.W. McGarvey, Guy N. Woods and James B. Coffman are three main contemporary supporters for this view; their argument is that as God has commanded Noah⁹ and Moses,¹⁰ He commands all Christians through the Holy Spirit in this age. It is quite surprising that most evangelical Chinese scholars and ministers are pro-impermissible. They believe that it is not fitting for Christians to eat blood,¹¹ yet they are quite tolerant of “eating food offered to idols.”¹² For them, the prohibitions against “strangled meat” and “blood” are clearly stated in the Apostolic Decree, and these two prohibitions are a continued teaching of Noahic and Mosaic law. We might be confused by the logic behind this, for both appear in the same list in the Jerusalem decree, yet their rationale is that Paul provides a revision or supplementary teaching on the issue of “eating idol food” in Romans 14, and 1 Corinthians 8 and 10. Paul’s teaching is meant to provide further insight on the practice.

⁸ “Noahic covenant” is also named as “Noahic covenant.” For the sake of the consistency, we will use “Noahic covenant.”

⁹ Guy N. Woods, *Questions and Answers*, 240.

¹⁰ James Burton Coffman, *Commentary on Acts* (Abilene, TX: ACU Press, 1977), 300.

¹¹ Most of them believe that these two items are related; we should view them as one.

¹² See Watchman Nee, *The Gospel of God: Understanding the Truth of God’s Dynamic Salvation* (Anaheim: Living Stream Ministry, 1990), 351-52. Nee comments, “[In 1 Cor 8], for the sake of the other Christians, and for the sake of loving them, though you may have the knowledge, you would rather not do it. You have the knowledge, but they do not have the knowledge. They feel condemned in their conscience before God. They feel that they have committed some great sin and are falling away again. Therefore, for their sake, we would not eat. This is the general meaning of this passage.” Also see Jun-Yu Lu, “Sermon on 1 Corinthians,” Message 10: 1-5. [cited 30 Jan 2015]. Online: <http://chungi.biblekm.com.tw>. Lu mentions that “eating idol food” in Taiwan is nothing special, and it is quite common for Christians facing the issue of “idol food.” Also, he comments that the kind of food that we eat is unimportant. For those who do not eat idol food, they do not seem to be holy. On the other side, for those who often eat idol food, it does not mean they are weaker in their faith.

2. The Permissible Position of Eating Blood and Strangled Meat

Scholars who hold the permissible position believe that these two prohibitions are not a mandatory law for contemporary churches. Figure 4 shows us that most scholars see the context of “strangled meat” and “eating blood” is affiliated with Leviticus 17-18, which is about dietary regulations and principles for Gentile sojourners, and also see those regulations as a part of many laws of the Old Testament. F.F. Bruce traces them to the Noahic covenant, yet many believe the abstinences are to establish a better preparation for table fellowship between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians.

Scholars	Position		Remarks
	Leviticus 11, 17-18 ¹³	Others	
R.J. Bauckham	X	Sojourners' law	It is related to the law of Gentiles living among Israelites. He also believes it is a reference of Noahic Covenant. ¹⁴
F.F. Bruce	X	Noahic Covenant	The abstinence is to maintain table fellowship between Jewish and Gentile believers.
H. Conzelmann	X	Table Fellowship	The decree should not be retained as the valid Law. ¹⁵
A. Fernando		Table Fellowship	It is for sensitivity concerns, not for theological reasons.
R.J. Knowling	X		Due to Moses' teaching, we should keep the law.
J.B. Lightfoot		Not permanent and universal	The prohibitions are temporary and local (Antioch, Syria, Cilicia).
I.H. Marshall	X	Dietary regulation	It is included in the food regulations from Lev 17:8-13.
B. Metzger		Murder	It is to prohibit murder, but not about eating strangled meat and blood.
D. Stern		Killing or murder	
J.R.W. Stott	X	Dietary regulation	The abstinence would be “courteous and temporary.” ¹⁶
E. Schnabel		Pagan diet, dietary laws, infanticide, and pagan worship	These two issues are related to pagan worship.
B. Witherington		Pagan worship	The decree is related to pagan worship; do not apply them in a literal sense for both are related to pagan worship.
J. Wycliffe ¹⁷	X	Pagan Diet	It is written for Gentile believers to avoid offending Jewish believers.
Chinese S3 ¹⁸	X		

Figure 4. The Comparative Chart of the Permissible View in Alphabetical Order

¹³ It also includes Deuteronomy 12.

¹⁴ Richard Bauckham, “James and Jerusalem church,” 465.

¹⁵ Hans Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles* (trans. James Limburg, A. Thomas Kraabel, and Donald H. Juel; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 118.

¹⁶ John R. W. Stott, *Acts* (Downers Grove: IVP Press, 1994), 249-250.

¹⁷ E.F. Harrison, *Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, 152.

¹⁸ This group of Chinese scholars includes Stephen C.T. Chen, Chia-S. Chen and Grant Chen.

In order to reduce the barriers of crucial issues such as “eating strangled meat” and “eating blood,” Jewish and Gentile Christians may live together as one body. E. Schnabel and B. Witherington believe that the four prohibitions in the Apostolic Decree are related to pagan religious practices, and that these four issues are related to the cultural background of the time.

J.B. Lightfoot and Stephen C.T. Chen comment that the Apostolic Decree is not universal, but local; it is not permanent, but temporary. They believe the decree is mainly designated for Antioch and Syria and Cilicia (Acts 15:23, 30, 41). It is temporary, for its existence is meant to neutralize the most crucial moment in the relationship between the Pharisaic party and Gentile believers; Jewish believers need some time to learn flexibly to accommodate changes to the new culture in the church.

B. A Comparison of the Analysis of the Scholars

Figure 5 clearly shows that almost all Western scholars hold the permissible position, and very few hold the impermissible view. However, as we have mentioned, most Chinese and Jewish scholars hold the impermissible position. Many might wonder what elements lead to this result. Here we list three elements that will impact the interpretation of the Bible: (1) Method of interpretation or view of the Bible; (2) Cultural or ethnical background; and (3) Denominational or Church doctrinal position.

1. *Method of Interpretation*

A faulty method of interpretation of the Bible will lead to bad or poor results. A good method with a wrong attitude will also lead to an unwanted product. We have to

The Impermissible Scholars/Church Leaders	
<i>Ethnic Group</i>	<i>Scholars</i>
Western	Tertullian, Justin Martyr, Origen, Peter Walpot, J.W. McGarvey, Coffman ¹⁹ and Woods
Jewish	D. Stern, ²⁰ A. Yehoshua ²¹
Chinese	Chinese S1= Watchman Nee, Caleb Huang, Jun-Lan Dong Chinese S2= Jun-Yi Lu, Vincent Cheung, Yi-Ming Chia, John H.H. Su
The Permissible Scholars/Church Leaders	
<i>Ethnic Group</i>	<i>Scholars</i>
Western	R.J. Bauckham, F.F. Bruce, H. Conzelmann, A. Fernando, R.J. Knowling, J.B. Lightfoot, I.H. Marshall, B. Metzger, J.R.W. Stott, E. Schnabel, B. Witherington, J. Wycliffe ²²
Chinese	Chinese S3= Stephen C.T. Chen, Chia-S. Chen and Grant Chen.

Figure 5. The Comparative Chart for the Impermissible and Permissible Groups

have a right method with a humble attitude in order to have a good interpretation.

Moreover, the work of the Holy Spirit must play an important role throughout the study.

Unfortunately, many so-called “godly men and women of God” hold firmly and seriously to the teaching of the Bible, but they take God’s word in a literal sense. Bernard Ramm comments that “it must be admitted that some very orthodox people think that verbal inspiration and literal interpretation belong together, for to them ‘literal interpretation’ means to take the Bible ‘as it is.’ Any other kind of interpretation is ‘tampering with God’s word.’ Their intention is genuine, but their idea of how scripture is to be protected is both naïve and wrong.”²³

Watchman Nee and Caleb Huang are two Chinese scholars who interpret the Bible this way; they hold firmly to the authority of the Bible, yet they usually take the words in a literal sense. Nee comments, “We must remember that the Bible is a spiritual book. ...Once we touch the spiritual things, we will spontaneously recognize the literal

¹⁹ Coffman sees the commandment of abstinence is neither from Moses’ law nor from Noah’s, but from the authority of the Holy Spirit; Coffman, *Acts*, 300.

²⁰ Stern, *Jewish New Testament*, 278.

²¹ Avram Yehoshua, *The Lifting of the Veil*, 146.

²² E.F. Harrison, 1152.

²³ Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1970), 126.

accuracy of the Word because all spiritual things are intrinsically accurate.”²⁴

Traditionally, most Chinese pastors-teachers use the Devotional-Practical Approach to do an exegesis of the Bible. This seems to be the strength of Chinese scholars’ interpretation, yet it has the potentiality to mislead from the real meaning of the text. As Ramm comments, “[this kind of preaching] places emphasis on edifying aspects of Scripture, and interpreting with the intention of developing the spiritual life.”²⁵ The approach highly underscores the devotional, practical, and edifying study of the Bible.²⁶ However, this approach will lead to very subjective interpretations, and sometimes it does not really give answers about the text. That is why we need a more objective interpretation, which is the Historical-Grammatical approach. We go back to the original languages and study the text based on the Greek Bible, for instance Acts 15:20 for this study. Based on this approach, we investigate the issues of “strangled meat” and “blood” from many related sources, such as culture, religion, geography, and history, and this approach is objective, evidential and persuasive.

2. *Impact of Culture on Interpretation*

What do we mean by “culture”? *The Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines culture as “the beliefs, customs, arts, etc., of a particular society, group, place, or time.”²⁷ Therefore, “culture includes what people think and believe, say, do, and make.”²⁸ Does one’s culture impact his or her interpretation of the Bible? Roy Zuck comments, “what one thinks

²⁴ Watchman Nee, *How to Study the Bible* (Anaheim: Living Stream Ministry, 1999), 33.

²⁵ Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 60.

²⁶ Ibid. 61.

²⁷ *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*. Cited 30 Dec 2014. Online: <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/culture>.

²⁸ Roy B. Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation: A Practical Guide to Discovering Biblical Truth* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 1991), 79.

influences what he does, and what he does or makes relates to what he believes, and so forth.”²⁹ For the purpose of this study, we are examining broad and general differences found between Eastern and Western cultures. Western culture and Eastern culture are quite different, and both have their own beauty. Kuang-Ming Wu makes a contrast between these two cultures; he comments that the approach of Western hermeneutics to the Bible is very objective, universal, and timeless,³⁰ yet Chinese hermeneutics is more subjective, situational, and historical.³¹ From observation of the exegetical approach of many Chinese scholars and ministers, their interpretations of a biblical text lean toward situational, which means their interpretations are very practical for the present situation. In other words, they are pragmatic. In this study, although some Chinese scholars express openness to the permissible position, unfortunately, they do not directly express their views if they might offend others.

Another characteristic of Chinese hermeneutics is historical; historical means keeping the old traditions. Keeping a good tradition of interpretation is not a bad thing in itself, yet keeping it because of its oldness is not necessarily a good practice. Even some Chinese Americans who live in the West are inevitably influenced by their parents’ culture; as Grace Y. May states that Chinese Americans are even influenced by their forefathers’ culture: “they are still influenced by Confucian ethics, parental privilege, tradition, and reverence for the old.”³² Her statement really tells us how impactful a culture is in one’s life. Undoubtedly, everyone is influenced by other cultures, especially

²⁹ Ibid., 80.

³⁰ Kuang-Ming Wu, “Textual Hermeneutics and Beyond” in *Classics and Interpretations: The Hermeneutic Traditions in Chinese Culture* (ed. Ching-i Tu; New Brunswick: Transaction, 2000), 291.

³¹ Ibid., 292.

³² Grace Y. May, “Viewing God through the Twin Lenses of Holiness and Mercy: A Chinese American Perspective” in *The Global God: Multicultural Evangelical Views of God* (eds. Aida Besançon Spencer and William David Spencer; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 183-84.

in this globalized age. However, the impact of the first culture, no matter if Eastern or Western, to a person is very significant. Therefore, we have to admit that sensitivity to one's culture is very important. For this reason, sometimes an application of biblical contextualization is needed.

3. Denominational Views on Interpretation

Every church has a certain standard of belief. The larger and older the church or the denomination is, the more complex and organized its statement of faith will be. It is good to have doctrinal or biblical guidelines for the interpretation of the Bible, yet sometimes it limits liberty of expression or insight into the text.

When we look at Guy N. Woods' and James B. Coffman's denominational backgrounds, they come from the same church background³³ that opposes eating blood. The same applies to Nee and Huang: they are affiliated with the Local Church movement of Taiwan, and these churches believe the prohibitions against eating blood are a continuation of Mosaic Law. Another more extreme example is the teaching of the Watchtower Ministry of Jehovah's Witnesses; they reject eating blood or even receiving a blood donation from others. "Does it allow the eating of blood? ... The Scriptures here cited show that the true religion does not teach or practice any of these things."³⁴

C. The Implications of the Exegetical Work on Acts 15:19-21

Based on the exegetical work on the passage in Chapter 2, we may conclude that the issues of abstinence from "strangled meat" and "blood" in Acts 15:19-21 explicitly

³³ James Burton Coffman (1905-2006) was one of the most influential persons among the Churches of Christ in the 20th century, and Guy N. Woods was also a very popular leader in that Church..

³⁴ *Watchtower*, "Is Your Religion the True One?" 1968 July 1 p.391.

refers to the context of Acts 15:16-18, which is related to the historical background of Leviticus 17-18. This has significant implications for our exegetical work in Acts 15: 19-21, two rationales of which we will detail below.

1. The Text Refers to the Historical Context of Gentile Believers in Jewish Culture Church

We note that our study shows the interpretation of the abstinence from “strangled meat” and “blood” must refer to James’ reference to his contemporary culture and practices. Our study shows that issues of “the strangled meat” and “blood” are related to religious practices of pagan worship and pagan delicacies of the apostolic times. James purposely relates these issues by directing us to see the pre-text (Acts 15:16-18) and post-text (15:21).

Bauckham comments that “Acts 15:16-18 establishes that Gentiles who join the eschatological people of God are not obliged to be circumcised and obey the Law of Moses.”³⁵ James’ exposition relates to the restoration of David’s dynasty, and the arrival of Gentiles to “the Chosen People was foretold by the prophet Amos, and forms part of a wider movement, the rebuilding of the fallen house of David... [And] the restoration of house of David was inaugurated in the Ascension or *sessio ad dextram* of risen Christ.”³⁶ James addresses this topic by relating it to Moses’ law in Leviticus 17-18, which is about the Gentile sojourners who live among Israelites. The post-text, Acts 15: 21, is James’

³⁵ Richard Bauckham, “James and the Jerusalem Church” in *The Book of Acts in Its Palestinian Setting*, 461.

³⁶ Simon Buttica, “Acts 15 or ‘Return of the Repressed? The Church and the Law in Acts” in *Torah in The New Testament* (eds. Michael Tait and Peter Oakes. London: T & T Clark, 2009), 123. Also see Craig Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 2255; He comments that the restoration of David’s house implies David’s dynasty, and Luke wants to affirm “the fulfilment of David’s line in Jesus.”

reminder to Gentile believers to be sensitive to Jewish culture. Bauckham continues to present his point that the decree is not just a pragmatic compromise,³⁷ but also that by “formulating in principle the extent of the authority of the Mosaic Law for Gentile Christians can the subsequent history of the observance be explained. The evidence shows that observance of the prohibitions was widespread for a long period.”³⁸ John Proctor comments that James uses the terms that link to many places in the Old Testament: “Within Jewish hermeneutics of the period, this is a logical and disciplined use of a recognized exegetical method.”³⁹ Because “strangled meat” and “blood” are related to pagan religious belief and pagan delicacies, these new Gentile converts have to respect the existing practice among Christians for the sake of unity and peace. Therefore, to abstain from “strangled meat” and “blood” means promoting unity and peace in the church.

2. The Text Confirms the Unity with Paul’s Teaching on the Apostolic Decree

Paul’s teaching on eating “idol food” and “unclean food” in Galatians 2, 1 Corinthians 8-10 and Romans 14-15 is about Christian liberty. Chapter 3 in this study has clarified the issue of “eating idol food,” the food might or might not relate to fornication and pagan worship. Paul teaches against the practice and involvement in any pagan religious activities. Regarding “meat bought from the marketplace,” Christians should apply Christian liberty when using it. Actually, this matter is similar to Acts 15:19-20, for

³⁷ Ibid., 464.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ John Proctor, “Proselytes and Pressure Cookers: The Meaning and Application of Acts 15:20,” *International Review of Mission*; (Oct 1996): 85, 339.

it is also about Christian liberty.⁴⁰ In other words, Paul's view toward the four prohibitions in the Apostolic Decree aligns thoroughly with the Apostolic Decree. Moreover, Paul's teaching is based on salvation by grace alone through faith. James' teaching holds the similar doctrine of salvation for his view is the collection of Peter and Paul's testimonies.

D. Practical Implications of Acts 15:20

The goal of this section is to apply our study to today's Christian context. First we apply the text to churches in general, and then to the Chinese Christian context in particular.

1. General Application

Luke's account of the Acts of the Apostles leads us to see the power of the gospel and the development of the Church of Jesus Christ. When the gospel is preached in a new location, it will impact the people and the society of that area, for the power of the gospel crosses cultural and racial barriers. With God's special providence, He purposely includes Acts 15, the Jerusalem Council, in the Bible in order to provide spiritual truth and insight into tough issues for Christian leaders of the following ages. Therefore, this is a significant passage for many pastors, missionaries, and Christian leaders in this multi-cultural, multi-ethnic age. Therefore, let us apply this passage in many churches in metropolitan cities in America, where church leaders have to face cultural/racial and sociological issues.

⁴⁰ John Proctor, "Proselytes," 478.

a. Culture Matters

One's culture is his or her identity for it includes what he or she thinks, believes, says, does, and makes.⁴¹ How do we understand one's culture? "By understanding reactions to larger cultural traditions, we can better understand that individuals in our culture may be the way they are because they may have reacted to influences in their own lives, influences similar to entire cultures."⁴² Offending one's culture means humiliating a person. Therefore, when we evangelize to friends who do not come from the same culture, we have to respect their cultural milieus. Missionaries in a foreign culture inevitably instill some part of their culture among the converts. Unfortunately, those new converts may be confused and misled if they think being Christian is to be westernized. Through the study of James' conclusion, it teaches us to be sensitive to other cultures.

b. Sociological Matters

What is the main sociological issue of today? Adam Jamrozik and Luisa Nocella write, "social inequality has been one of sociology's main concerns, and the issue of inequality is present in some form in any enquiry."⁴³ The sociological issue that James concerns himself with is the peace and unity in the church as a consequence of the involvement of Gentile culture. In order to establish a harmonious life between Jewish Christians and Gentile believers in their daily lives, both groups have to set aside some issues. James urges the Jewish believers to set aside the theological issue of requiring Gentile believers to get circumcised in order to be part of the Christian community. However, James

⁴¹ Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation*, 79.

⁴² Aida Spencer and William Spencer, *Global God*, 250.

⁴³ Adam Jamrozik and Luisa Nocella, *The Sociology of Social Problems* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 128.

reminds Gentile Christians to put aside their old practices and especially certain practices that caused Jewish Christians to feel uncomfortable.

Church unity starts with the acceptance between two or more different groups. They have to accept those of a different culture, ethnic background, political preference, and socio-economic status. Accepting others means giving in and giving up our preferences, or as Paul says, “To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings” (1 Cor 9:22-23 ESV).

c. Theology Matters

The Jerusalem Council met because of confusion over the doctrine of soteriology. Some Jewish believers insisted that Gentile converts be circumcised in order to be part of the Christian community. Certainly, this teaching is wrong, and it needs to be corrected. The council plays an important role as they share their points, debate with a right goal, and analyze with exposition of the scriptures. James’ conclusion shows us how a good leader ends with exposition of the Scripture, by pointing them to the authority of the scriptures. In other words, true unity can only be accomplished when we have “the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God” (Eph 4:13). We have to admit that differences always exist among us, and we must accept this reality. Enjoy God-given differences in the church. If we cannot enjoy them, at least we can respect them.

2. *Application in the Context of Chinese Churches*

It is quite interesting to find that the Chinese are somewhat similar to Jews. Among the similarities that he lists, Fenggang Yang comments, “Like Judaic culture, Chinese are traditional. Their culture emphasizes moral laws, filial piety, and traditionalism.”⁴⁴ They uphold the importance of their cultural traditions⁴⁵ and reverence to the old.⁴⁶ Cultural issues often become an obstacle to listening to or accepting the gospel. China has 5000 years of history; many Chinese cultural roots have been ingrained in every part of Chinese life. Many cultural practices are related to their religious practice. Therefore, after they convert to Christianity, they have to examine the difference between cultural and religious issues. For example, “blood”⁴⁷ can be a kind of Chinese delicacy, yet it also can be a “food” for the idols. Sometimes they treat these as the same issue; the former one should not be a big concern, yet the latter requires application of the principle of Christian liberty. The following are applications to Christian or Asians Christians regarding “eating blood.”

a. Sensitivity to Different Cultures

“Not eating blood” can be part of a culture, and this culture is influenced by the ministers of the older generation. However, another group does not see “eating blood” as “normative.” If the Apostolic Decree is written to help us in building up a communication between two different cultures, namely “permissible culture of eating blood” and “impermissible culture of eating blood,” we have to apply it carefully by

⁴⁴ Fenggang Yang, *Chinese Christians in America: Conversion, Assimilation, and Adhesive Identities* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1999), 175.

⁴⁵ Yang, *Chinese Christians in America*, 198.

⁴⁶ May, “Viewing God,” 184

⁴⁷ The issues of “strangled meat” and “blood” usually are viewed as an issue of eating blood.

reducing any possible barriers. In our study, we have seen James' purpose is to remind Gentile Christians who hold the "permissible view of eating blood" to abstain from it for the sake of establishing a good relationship. Therefore, those who hold "the permissible view" can start with James' recommendation by putting aside their preference for the sake of others, who are different from them. Yet, they have to keep their conscience of Christian liberty. For those who hold "the impermissible view," they should understand that "eating blood" is not an essential theological issue, and it is not a fundamental doctrine of the Bible. Therefore, both groups should step one step backward in order to begin a good communication. The truth is to build up one another.

b. Holistic Teaching of Acts 15:19-21

Most of the Chinese scholars mentioned in this study are influenced by Chinese scholars or teachers of yesteryear, and these teachers were trained or influenced by others, such as Watchman Nee, Yu-Ming Chia, and Mingdao Wang, who held the impermissible view themselves. This is their tradition, which they keep and teach to the next generations. For the benefit of the spiritual health of Chinese churches, we have to help leaders to grasp a balanced teaching of the Scripture. We have to help them to understand that the impermissible view is not a necessary interpretation of the text. Thus, we present other scholars who also love the Lord and are faithful to the authority of the Bible, but hold a permissible view on this issue. Besides that, we can help them to use a more comprehensive way to interpret the text: to go back to the original text, the socio-historical background of the time, and the context.

c. Bridging the Gap between Different Groups

Some churches have split due to different views on interpreting these issues, and some leaders have become enemies due to their persistency. This thesis can be an avenue by which two or more parties who hold different views may begin to dialogue and exchange perceptions. Again, it is to help them understand other interpretations of the text, so they will respect one another. It is to remind them that God purposely inserted this Apostolic Decree to help us to learn to respect and accept those who are different from us, in order to expand the gospel for His glory.

Summary

This thesis has attempted to study the fourfold prohibitions of the Apostolic Decree, especially in regard to the issues of “strangled meat” and “blood.” Our study began with the historical background of the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15, yet our targeted focus is on the abstinence from “strangled food” and “blood.” It is necessary to review carefully the data and explore what various scholars from the past and today have observed about these issues.

Our study focused on the exegetical work for the passage, namely Acts 15:19-21. This work is based on the original Greek words, and the cultural and historical background of the time. The result shows us James’ determination in writing the Apostolic Decree to Gentile-Christians not as a theological order, yet for sociological and pragmatic reasons.⁴⁸ In other words, this decree was applicable to the situation of the time and for certain areas, so it is not normative.

⁴⁸ Charles H. Savelle Jr. “The Jerusalem Council and the Lukan Perspective of the Law in Acts 15” (Ph.D. diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 2013), 215.

The analysis shows that scholars mainly hold two views, the impermissible view or permissible view. Most Chinese scholars and ministers hold the former position, while a few Western scholars and ministers hold this view due to their denominational backgrounds. The two prohibitions are not permanent and universal, yet these issues have raised concerns among some cultures and ethnic groups. On the other hand, the truth in the Apostolic Decree is for all believers of Jesus Christ of all ages. God uses Luke to write to us about the Jerusalem Council in order to show us the development of Christ's church through the ministry of the gospel, to the Jew first and then the Gentile. The Council not only decides Gentile Christian's privileges, but also their position in God's household, the church. Actually, it typifies the future eschatological kingdom of God. We have to admit that finally whether Jewish or Gentile Christian, whether Chinese Christians who hold "permissible view" or "impermissible view" for the issue of "eating blood," one day we will all gather in His glorious kingdom.

APPENDIX 1
TEXTUAL VARIANTIAN UNITS IN ACTS 15:20

1. Acts 15:20a (UBS⁴)

Witnesses	Variant 1	καὶ τῆς πορνείας		Variant 2καὶ πνικτῶν καὶ τῆς πορνείας (v29)		Variant 3	omit	
	Symbol	Date	Text-type	Symbol	Date	Text-type	Symbol	Date	Text-type
Place in following sequence Greek Papyri, Uncils	ⲡ74	7	A				ⲡ45	3	A
	ⲛ	4	A						
	A	5	A						
	B	4	A						
	C	5	A						
	D	5	W						
	E	6-7	B						
	Ψ	8/9	A&B						
	L (Byz)	9	B						
	P(Byz)	9	B						
Version	it ^{ar} (ar)	9	W				eth	13	B
	c	12/13	W						
	d	5	W						
	dem	13	W						
	e	6	W						
	gig	13	W						
	l	7	W						
	p	12	W						
	ph	12	W						
	ro	10	W						
	w	14/15	W						
	vg	4/5	W						
	syr ^p (p)	5	B						
	syr ^h (h)	7	B						
	cop ^{sa} (sa)	6-7	Alex						
	cop ^{bo} (bo)	4/5	Alex						
	Arm	5	C						
	Geo	5	C						
	Slav	9	B						
	Irenaeus ^{lat}	4	W						
	Origen ^{lat}	5	A/C						
	Chrysostom	5	B						
	Ambrosia-ster	4	W						
	Apostolic Const.	4							
Church Fathers									

Greek Minuscules and lectionaries	33	9	A	945	11				
	36	12		1739	10	A			
	81	11	A	1891	10				
	181	10							
	307	10							
	453	14							
	610	12							
	614	13	W						
Text types are: Alexandrian (A), Western (W), Caesarean (C), Byzantine (B). If unknown leave blank	1175	10	I						
	1409	14							
	1678	14							
	2344	11	A						
	/1178	9	B						
Assessment of each variant	Remark: It has the earliest Greek manuscripts (P74, K, A, B, C, D, E). It has text-types of Alexandrian (the most reliable text-style), Western and Caesarean. It has variety of geographical distributions for its witnesses are from Alexandria, Western and Caesarea. Church fathers, such as Irenaeus, Origen and Chrysostom, use it. Therefore, it is a very good variant.			Remark: It has late manuscripts (10-11 centuries). Its text-type is in Alexandrian, yet only one and late. It has limited geographical distribution. Therefore, it is a weak variant because it has very few manuscripts and not enough witnesses of geographical distribution.			Remark: P45 is a rather good manuscript, but Ethiopic is a later translation.		

2. Acts 15:20b (UBS⁴)

Witnesses	Variant 1	καὶ τοῦ πνικτοῦ		Variant2	καὶ πνικτοῦ		Variant 3	Omit	
	Symbol	Date	Text-Type	Symbol	Date	Text-Type	Symbol	Date	Text-Type
Place in following sequence Greek Papyri, Uncils	ⲡ45	3	A	ⲡ74	7	A	D	5	W
	ⲛ	4	A	A	5	A			
	C	5	A	B	4	A			
	E	6-7	B	Ψ	8/9	A&B			
	L (Byz)	9	B						
	P(Byz)	9	B						
Version	it ^{ar} (ar)	IX	W				it ^d (d)	5	W
	C	12/13	W				Gig	13	W
	Dem	13	W						
	e	6	W						
	gig	13	W						
	l	7	W						
	p	12	W						
	ph	12	W						
	ro	10	W						
	w	14/15	W						
	vg	4/5	W						
	syr ^p (p)	5	B						
	syr ^h (h)	7	B						
	cop ^{sa} (sa)	6-7	A						
	cop ^{bo} (bo)	4/5	A						
	Arm	5	C						
	Geo	5	C						
	Slav	9	B						
	Eth	13	B						
Church Fathers				Apostolic Const.	4	A	Irenaeus ^{acc} to 1739	4	W
	Origen ^{lat}	5	A/C				Ambrosiaster	4	W
	Chrysostom	5	B						
Greek Minuscles and lectionaries	36	12	B	33	9	A			
	181	10		81	11	A			
	307	10							
	453	14							
	610	12							
	614	13	W						
	945	11							
	1175	10	I						
	1409	14							
	1678	14							
Text types are: Alexan-drian (A), Western (W), Caesarean (C), Byzantine (B). If unknown leave blank									
	1739	10	A						
	1891	10							
	2344	11	A						
	1178	9	B						

Assessment of each variant	<p>Remark: It has the earliest Greek manuscripts (P45, K, A, C, E); which are dated as early as 3rd to 5th centuries(P45, K A), and, C, E are dated from 5th to 7th centuries. Its text-types cover from Alexandrian (the most reliable text-style), Western, Caesarean and Byzantine. It has variety of geographical distributions for its witnesses are from Alexandria, Western and Caesarea. Church fathers, such as Origen and Chrysostom, use it. Therefore, it is a good variant.</p>	<p>Remark: It has some earlier manuscripts such A, B and P74 which range from 4-7 centuries), yet Variant 1 has one as early as 3rd century. Its text-type is mainly Alexandrian. It has limited geographical distribution, mainly Alexandrian. Therefore, it is a weaker variant if we compare with Variant 1 because it has very few manuscripts, and not enough witness of geographical distribution.</p>	<p>Remark: It has all Western text-types and very limited geographical distribution . Therefore, it is not as good.</p>

3.Acts 15:20c (UBS⁴)

Witnesses	Variant 1	αἵματος		Variant 2	αἵματος καὶ ὅσα μὴ θελουσιν ἑαυτοῖς γίνεσθαι ἑτέροις μὴ ποιεῖτε		Variant 3	καὶ τῆς πορνείας καὶ αἵματος καὶ ὅσα ἂν μὴ θελουσιν αὐτοῖς γίνεσθαι ἑτέροις μὴ ποιεῖν	
	Symbol	Date	Text-type	Symbol	Date	Text-type	Symbol	Date	Text-type
Place in following sequence Greek Papyri, Uncils	P45	3	A	D	5	W			
	P74	7	A						
	K	4	A						
	A	5	A						
	B	4	A						
	C	5	A						
	E	6-7	B						
	Ψ	8/9	A&B						
	L (Byz)	9	B						
	P (Byz)	9	B						
Version	It ^c (c)	12/13	W	it ^{ar} (ar)	9	W			
				d	5	W			
				cop ^{sa} (sa)	6-7	A			
	dem	13	W	eth	13	B			
	e	6	W	slav	9				
	gig	13	W						

Church Fathers	l	7	W						
	p	12	W						
	ph	12	W						
	ro	10	W						
	w	14/15	W						
	vg	4/5	W						
	syr ^p (p)	5	B						
	syr ^h (h)	7	B						
	cop ^{bo} (bo)	4/5	A						
	Arm	5	C						
	geo	5	C						
	slav	9	B						
	Origen ^{lat1/2}	5	A/C	Irenaeus ^{lat}	4	W			
	Chrysostom	5	B						
	Apostolic Const.	ca. 380	W						
	33	9	A				945	11	
	36	10	B				1739	10	A
	81	11					1891	10	
	181	10					/1178	9	B
	307	10							
Greek Minuscules and lectionaries	453	14							
	610	12							
	614	13	W						
Text types are: Alexandrian (A), Western (W), Caesarean (C), Byzantine(B). If unknown leave blank.	1175	10							
	1409	14							
	1678	14							
	2344	11	A						
Assessment of each variant	Remark: It has the earliest Greek manuscripts (P45, P74, K, A, B, C), which are dated from 3 rd century to 5 th century. It has text-types of Alexandrian (the most reliable text-style), Western, Caesarean, and Byzantine. It has variety of geographical distributions for its witnesses from Alexandria, Western and Caesarea. Church fathers, such as Origen and Chrysostom, use it. Therefore, it is a good variant.			Remark: It has one early manuscript (D in 5 th century), and the rest are quite late. Its text-types include Alexandrian and Western. It has very few limited geographical distributions: Alexandrian and Western. Therefore, this variant is not as strong as Variant 1.			Remark: It is an insignificant variant due to its very few and late manuscripts.		

APPENDIX 2: TRANSLATION AND THE SENTENCE FLOW OF ACTS 15:19-21

19	διό There- fore	ἐγώ I	κρίνω determine	παρενοχλεῖν μὴ not to trouble	τοῖς ἐπιστρέφουσιν ἐπὶ τὸν θεόν ἀπὸ τῶν ἐθνῶν the Gentiles having converted to God			Therefore, I am determining not to trouble the Gentiles when they convert to God,
20	ἀλλὰ But			ἐπιστεῖλαι to write	αὐτοῖς them	τοῦ ἀπέχεσθαι τῶν ἀλισγημάτων καὶ τῶν εἰδώλων καὶ τῆς πορνείας καὶ τοῦ πικτοῦ καὶ τοῦ αἵματος to abstain from the defiled (food) of idols, and the sexual immorality, and the strangled meat, and blood.	but to write them in order to abstain from (things) of defilement of idols, and the fornication, and the strangled meat, and the blood.	
21	ὥστε For	Μωϋσῆς Moses	ἔχει ἐκ γενεῶν ἀρχαίων κατὰ πόλιν has from former generations in every city		τοὺς κηρύσσοντας αὐτὸν ἀναγινωσκόμενος ἐν ταῖς συναγωγαῖς κατὰ πᾶσιν πόλεσιν the ones proclaiming him being read in the synagogues every Sabbath.			For Moses, since the former generations in every city has the ones proclaiming him, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath.

APPENDIX 3

WORD STUDIES (ACTS 15:19-20)

κρίνω (15:19)

κρίνω (lexicon form) = to condemn, to make a judgment or to pass a judgment, to make a decree, and to determine a result.

- He said to him, “I will condemn (κρίνω) you with your own words, you wicked servant! You knew that I was a severe man, taking what I did not deposit and reaping what I did not sow?” (Luke 19:22 ESV)
- I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge (κρίνω), and my judgment (κρίσις) is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me (John 5:30 ESV).
- If anyone hears my words and does not keep them, I do not judge (κρίνω) him; for I did not come to judge (κρίνω) the world but to save the world (John 12:47 ESV).
- “But I will judge (κρίνω) the nation that they serve,” said God, “and after that they shall come out and worship me in this place” (Acts 7:7 ESV).

Remark 1: It means “condemn,” or “sentence to receive a judgment.”

- Judge (κρίνω) not, that you be not judged (μὴ κρίνω). For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged (κρίματι κρίνετε κριθήσεσθε), and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. (Matt 7:1-2 ESV) ¹
- Do not judge (μὴ κρίνω) by appearances, but judge with right judgment (John 7:24 ESV).
- You people judge (κρίνω) according to the flesh; I am not judging (κρίνω) anyone. But even if I judge (κρίνω), My judgment is true;... (John 8:15-16 ESV).
- Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges (ὁ κρίνων). For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge (ὁ κρίνων), practice the very same things (Rom 2:1 ESV).
- Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment (μὴ κρίνω) on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him (Rom 14:3 ESV).
- Therefore let no one pass judgment (κρίνω) on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath (Col 2:16 ESV).
- Do not speak evil against one another, brothers. The one who speaks against a brother or judges (κρίνω) his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge (James 4:11 ESV).

Remark 2: The word means “making a judgment” or “passing judgment on certain persons.”

¹ Also see Luke 6:37.

In the Old Testament, we can go to the LXX² to find similar or related words to this word κρίνω. In Psalm 74:2, God says, “When I shall take a set time, I will judge (κρίνω) righteously. For God’s vengeance based on His justice (Isa 49:25, Jer 58:36, Ezek 18:30, 34:22).³ In Daniel 3:29 the word means “making a decree.”⁴

- The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you delivered over and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided (κρίναντος) to release him (Acts 3:13 ESV).
- For Paul had decided (κέκρικται) to sail past Ephesus, so that he might not have to spend time in Asia, for he was hastening to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost (Acts 20:16 ESV).
- But concerning the Gentiles who have believed, we wrote, having decided (κρίναντες) that they should abstain from meat sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from fornication (Acts 21:25 NAS).
- For I decided (κρίνω) to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified (1 Cor 2:2 ESV).
- But whoever is firmly established in his heart, being under no necessity but having his desire under control, and has determined (κέκρικεν) this in his heart, to keep her as his betrothed, he will do well (1 Cor 7:37 ESV).

Remark 3: The word could mean “making a decision or reaching to a conclusion” and “determining a result.”

Final remark: κρίνω means “making a judgment” or “passing judgment on certain persons.” It could also mean “making a decision or conclusion”, and sometimes it means “condemn,” or “sentence to receive a judgment.” In the Old Testament, we can go to LXX to find a similar or related meaning for κρίνω. In Psalm 74:2, God says, “When I shall take a set time, I will judge (κρίνω) righteously.” For God shows vengeance based on His justice (Isa 49:25, Jer 58:36, Ezek 18:30, 34:22).⁵ In Daniel the word means “making a decree” (3:29).

²Septuagint Version of The Old Testament and Apocrypha with English Translation, translated by Lancelot C. L. Brenton (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1972).

³ For thus says the LORD: "Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken, and the prey of the tyrant be rescued, for I will contend with those who contend with you, and I will save your children (Isa 49:25 ESV); Therefore thus says the LORD: "Behold, I will plead your cause and take vengeance for you. I will dry up her sea and make her fountain dry (Jer 51:36 ESV); "Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, declares the Lord GOD. Repent and turn from all your transgressions, lest iniquity be your ruin (Ezek 18:30 ESV).

⁴ [Nebuchadnezzar says,] "Therefore I make a decree: Any people, nation, or language that speaks anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego shall be torn limb from limb, and their houses laid in ruins, for there is no other god who is able to rescue in this way" (Dan 3:29 ESV).

⁵ For thus says the LORD: "Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken, and the prey of the tyrant be rescued, for I will contend with those who contend with you, and I will save your children (Isa 49:25 ESV); Therefore thus says the LORD: "Behold, I will plead your cause and take vengeance for you. I will dry up her sea and make her fountain dry (Jer 51:36 ESV); "Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, declares the Lord GOD. Repent and turn from all your transgressions, lest iniquity be your ruin (Ezek 18:30 ESV).

παρενοχλεῖν (15:19)

παρενοχλέω (lexicon form)= to cause trouble, to annoy and to attack abusively.

- Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble (παρενοχλέω) those of the Gentiles who turn to God (Acts 15:19 ESV).

This word only appears once in the New Testament. However, it appears many times in the LXX.

- But I, when they troubled (παρενοχλέω) me, put on sackcloth, and humbled my soul with fasting: and my prayer shall return to my own bosom (Ps 35:13 LXE).
- What! Is there any reason in vain words? Or what will hinder (παρενοχλέω) thee from answering? (Job 16:3 LXE)
- And she wept before him the seven days, during which their banquet lasted: and it came to pass on the seventh day, that he told her, because she troubled (παρενοχλέω) him; and she told it to the children of her people (Judg 14:17 LXA).

Remark 1: It means “to cause trouble.”

- And it came to pass as she pressed him (παρηνώχλησεν αὐτόν) sore with her words continually, and straitened him, that his spirit failed almost to death (Judg 16:16).
- Also no man shall have authority to meddle with or to molest (παρενοχλεῖν)⁶ any of them in any matter (1 Macc 10:35 LXE).

Remark 2: It means “to attack abusively” or “to annoy or to cause someone to be grieved by words.”

Final remark: παρενοχλέω means to cause trouble, to annoy, or to attack someone abusively; twice in Samson’s case, he was troubled and pressed sore by words, and eventually he compromised with others (Judg 14:17; 16:16).

ἀπέχεσθαι (15:20)

ἀπέχω (lexicon form) = to receive reward, to keep far away from certain things, and to have enough.

- "Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward (ἀπέχω)..” And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward (ἀπέχω) (Matt 6:2, 5 ESV).
- "But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation (ἀπέχετε τὴν παράκλησιν ὑμῶν)” (Luke 6:24 ESV).

⁶ NRS translates it as “annoy.”

- I have received (ἀπέχω) full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God (Phil 4:18 ESV).

Remark 1: It means “receiving reward.”

- And he came the third time and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? It is enough (ἀπέχω); the hour has come. The Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners (Mark 14:41 ESV).

Remark 2: It means “enough.”

- But the boat was already many stadia away from the land (ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς ἀπεῖχεν), battered by the waves; for the wind was contrary (Matt 14:24 NAS).
- "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me (ἀπέχει ἀπ' ἐμοῦ) (Matt 15:8 ESV).
- And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off (μακρὰν ἀπέχοντος), his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him (Luke 15:20 ESV).
- For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from (ἀπέχω) sexual immorality (1Thess 4:3 ESV).
- Who forbid marriage and require abstinence from (ἀπέχω) foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth (1Tim 4:3 ESV).
- Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from (ἀπέχω) the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul (1Pet 2:11 ESV).

Remark 3: The words mean “having certain distance” and when the word is in middle voice, the word mean “to keep away from certain things.”

Final remark: The word has various meanings; the first could mean “to keep away from something”⁷ when it is in the middle voice, a second meaning is “receiving a reward” and a third is “enough.” In the LXX, the word has a similar meaning to the first; 1 Samuel 21:5, Job 1:1, 28:28, and Ezekiel 11:15 describe “keeping far away from evils.”

ἀλίσγημάτων (15:20)

ἀλίσγημα (lexical form) = to defile or to pollute; the related word ἀλίζω= to be salted ceremonially

- For everyone will be salted (ἀλίζω) with fire (Mark 9:49 ESV).

⁷ Many places in NT, it implies the abstinence from sinful or immoral acts (1 Thess 4:3, 1 Pet 2:2).

- But Daniel resolved that he would not defile (ἀλίζω)⁸ himself with the king's food, or with the wine that he drank. Therefore he asked the chief of the eunuchs to allow him not to defile himself (Dan 1:8 ESV).

Final remark: The word means pollution or defilement; this word appears only once. The related word ἀλίζω means “polluted ceremonially” (Mark 9:49). In LXX, Daniel purposed in his heart, that he would not defile himself with the king's table, nor with the wine of his drink: and he entreated the chief of the eunuchs that he might not defile (μὴ ἀλίσγηθῇ) himself (Dan 1:8 LXE).⁹ Also, in Leviticus 2:13, it is written, “and every gift of your sacrifice shall be seasoned with salt; omit not the salt of the covenant of the Lord from your sacrifices: on every gift of yours ye shall offer salt (ἀλισθήσεται) to the Lord your God (Lev 2:13 LXE). Therefore, the word means pollution ceremonially due to the worship of idols.

εἰδώλων (15:20)

εἰδωλον (lexical form) = images or pagan gods.

1. Image

- And they made a calf in those days, and offered a sacrifice to the idol (τῷ εἰδώλῳ) and were rejoicing in the works of their hands (Acts 7:41 ESV).
- You know that when you were pagans you were led astray to mute idols (τὰ εἰδωλα), however you were led (1Cor 12:2 ESV).
- The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands nor give up worshiping demons and idols (τὰ εἰδωλα) of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood, which cannot see or hear or walk, (Rev 9:20 ESV)

Remark 1: The word means manmade images from metal or wood as an object to be worshipped. Also, we can find the related word in the LXX; The Lord forbids Israelites to make any idols or images from metals or stones according to the fashion of pagan gods.¹⁰

2. Pagan gods

- You who say that one must not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols (τὰ εἰδωλα), do you rob temples? (Rom 2:22 ESV)

⁸ LXX.

⁹ καὶ ἐνεθυμήθη Δανιηλ ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ ὅπως μὴ ἀλίσγηθῇ ἐν τῷ δείπνῳ τοῦ βασιλέως καὶ ἐν ᾧ πίνει οἶνον καὶ ἡξίωσε τὸν ἀρχιευνοῦχον ἵνα μὴ συμμολυνθῇ (Dan 1:8 LXX).

¹⁰ Thou shalt not make to thyself an idol, nor likeness of anything, whatever things are in the heaven above, and whatever are in the earth beneath, and whatever are in the waters under the earth (Exod 20:4 LXE); And I will render your pillars desolate, and will utterly destroy your wooden images made with hands; and I will lay your carcases on the carcases of your idols, and my soul shall loathe you (Lev 26:30 LXE); And now they have sinned increasingly, and have made for themselves a molten image of their silver, according to the fashion of idols, the work of artificers accomplished for them: they say, Sacrifice men, for the calves have come to an end (Hos 13:2 LXE).

- Therefore, as to the eating of food offered to idols (τῶν εἰδωλοθύτων) we know that "an idol (εἶδωλον) has no real existence," and that "there is no God but one...However, not all possess this knowledge. But some, through former association with idols, eat food as really offered to an idol (τοῦ εἰδώλου ὡς εἰδωλόθυτον) and their conscience, being weak, is defiled" (1 Cor 8:4, 7 ESV).
- What do I imply then? That food offered to idols (εἶδωλον) is anything, or that an idol (εἶδωλόν) is anything? (1 Cor 10:19 ESV)
- What agreement has the temple of God with idols (εἶδωλον)? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, "I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people (2 Cor 6:16 ESV).
- For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols (ἀπὸ τῶν εἰδώλων) to serve the living and true God (1 Thess 1:9 ESV).
- Little children, keep yourselves from idols (τῶν εἰδώλων) (1 John 5:21 ESV).

Remark 2: The word "idol" also represents false god or pagan, and the same meaning appears in LXX (Num 25:2, 1 Kings 11:2, Isa 41:28, Jer 9:14, Ezek 1:16).

Final Remark: The word means images of idols that are made from metals, wood, or stones. Often, it means false gods. The LXX sometimes translates the word (לַבָּ) as "Baals" (Jer 9:14, 2 Chron 17:3 and 28:2). The word is also used as images of Chemosh, god of the Moabites, Ashtoreth, goddess of the Sidonians, and Milcom the god of the Ammonites (1 Kings 11:33).¹¹ In Ezekiel, the term relates to the worship of idols with the practice of prostitution (16:16). The even sacrifice their children as acts of worship of idols (23:39). Therefore, it is a spiritual sin for the act of idolatry it is an instrument of spiritual uncleanness (Ezek 36:25).

πορνείας (Acts 15:20)

πορνεία (lexical form) = sexual immorality (literal meaning), unfaithful to the Lord (figurative meaning), and temple prostitution (ritual meaning).

1. Literal meaning

- But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality (πορνεία), makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery (Matt 5:32 ESV).
- And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality (πορνεία), and marries another, commits adultery (Matt 19:9 ESV).
- For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality (πορνεία), theft, murder, adultery (μοιχεῖα), coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness (Mark 7:21-22 ESV).

¹¹ Because he forsook me, and sacrificed to Astarte the abomination of the Sidonians, and to Chamos, and to the idols of Moab, and to their king the abomination of the children of Ammon, and he walked not in my ways, to do that which was right before me, as David his father *did*. (1 Kings 11:33 LXA)

- You are doing the works your father did." They said to him, "We were not born of sexual immorality (πορνεία). We have one Father-- even God " (John 8:41 ESV).
- "Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food" - and God will destroy both one and the other. The body is not meant for sexual immorality (πορνεία), but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body...Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person (πορνεύων) sins against his own body (1Cor 6:13, 18 ESV).
- But because of the temptation to sexual immorality (πορνεία), each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband (1 Cor 7:2 ESV).
- I fear that when I come again my God may humble me before you, and I may have to mourn over many of those who sinned earlier and have not repented of the impurity, sexual immorality (πορνεία), and sensuality that they have practiced (2 Cor 12:21 ESV).
- Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality (πορνεία), impurity, sensuality (Gal 5:19 ESV).
- Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality (πορνεία), impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry (Col 3:5 ESV).
- For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality (πορνεία) (1Thess 4:3 ESV).

Remark 1: πορνεία could mean sexual immorality or any sexually activity outside of a legal marriage (Matt 5:22). It is God's teaching to abstain from fornication.

2. Figurative meaning

- Another angel, a second, followed, saying, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who made all nations drink the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality (πορνεία)" (Rev 14:8 ESV).
- "With whom the kings of the earth have committed sexual immorality (πορνεία), and with the wine of whose sexual immorality the dwellers on earth have become drunk." (Rev 17:2 ESV)
- For all nations have drunk the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality (πορνεία), and the kings of the earth have committed immorality with her, and the merchants of the earth have grown rich from the power of her luxurious living." (Rev 18:3 ESV)

Remark 2: πορνεία has figurative meaning of unfaithful to the Lord.

3. Ritual meaning

- I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality (πορνεία) (Rev 2:21 ESV).
- Nor did they repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality (πορνεία) or their thefts (Rev 9:21 ESV).

Remark 3: πορνεία could identify as a ritual of pagan worship that is related to the practice temple prostitution.

Final remark: πορνεία means sexual immorality or any sexual activity physically or mentally outside of legal marriage. Figuratively, it also means any unfaithful acts toward the Lord. In other words, fornication is spiritual sin. Ritually, it relates to the practice of temple prostitution. In the Old Testament, the word includes harlotry actions or lustful thinking. It could mean “playing harlotry” (Gen 38:24). Sometimes it means having sexual activity which is outside of marriage (Hos 1:2, 4:12), and here the word has a spiritual meaning of longing after idols and deserting the true God. It is the cause of the spirit of harlotry in people’s heart (Hos 4:12; 5:4; Nah 3:4). Also, Jeremiah warns the people for committing adultery and lustful neighing; the acts symbolize their unfaithfulness to the Lord and their worship of idols (Jer 13:27). In Tobit 8:7, it is written, “And now, O Lord, I take not this my sister for lust but uprightly: therefore mercifully ordain that we may become aged together”. Also, Tobit reminds the Jews that mixed marriages¹² with non-Jews is an act leading to fornication.

πνικτοῦ (15:20)

πνικτός (lexical form)- other texts are found in Acts 15:29 (πνικτῶν) and 21:25 (πνικτός).

1. πνικτοῦ and similar words

- But should write to them to abstain from the things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from what has been strangled (πνικτός), and from blood (Act 15:20 ESV).

Remark 1: the word means the things that have been strangled or strangled meat. Other similar passages are in Acts 15:29 and 21:25.

2. The word is related to πνίγω”

- But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke (πνικτός) him, saying, “Pay what you owe” (Matt 18:28 ESV).
- Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked (πνικτός) them (Matt 13:7 ESV).
- So he gave them permission. And the unclean spirits came out and entered the pigs; and the herd, numbering about two thousand, rushed down the steep bank into the sea and drowned (πνικτός) in the sea (Mark 5:13 ESV).

Remark 2: πνικτός means animals which are drowned or choked to death.

Final remark: The word means meats from choked, strangled or drowned animals. also, animals that are killed for food without having the blood drained from them or meat that has blood in it.

¹²“Beware of all whoredom, my son, and chiefly take a wife of the seed of thy fathers, and take not a strange woman to wife, which is not of thy father's tribe: for we are the children of the prophets, Noe, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: remember, my son, that our fathers from the beginning, even that they all married wives of their own kindred, and were blessed in their children, and their seed shall inherit the land” (Tob 4:12 LXA).

αἷματος (Acts 15:20)

αἷμα (lexical form) = human blood, human being, murder, or blood of sacrificed animals.

- [God] was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone [with flesh and blood] (σὰρκι καὶ αἵματι) (Gal 1:16 ESV).

Remark 1: It means “human blood.”

- Who were born, not of blood (ἐξ αἱμάτων) nor of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God (John 1:13 ESV).
- Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood (σὰρκός καὶ αἵματος), he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil (Heb 2:14 ESV).

Remark 2: The combination of the words “flesh” and “blood” means physical bodies that live.

- They cried out with a loud voice, "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood (αἷμα) on those who dwell on the earth" (Rev 6:10 ESV).

Remark 3: It means “murder.”

- "Then they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. (Exod 12:7 ESV; cf. 29:12, Lev 4:5-7).
- Only you shall not eat the blood; you shall pour it out on the earth like water (Deut 12:16 ESV; cf. 12:22-23, 15:22-23).
- Remark 4: The word also means “animal blood” or “the blood that is in meat.”
- Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood (αἷμα) (Acts 20:28 ESV).
- For it is impossible for the blood (αἷμα) of bulls and goats to take away sins (Heb 10:4 ESV).
- According to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood (ῥαντισμὸν αἵματος): May grace and peace be multiplied to you (1Pet 1:2 ESV).
- For when every commandment of the law had been declared by Moses to all the people, he took the blood (αἷμα) of calves and goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people (Heb 9:19 ESV).

Remark 5: It means “blood of sacrificed animals.” This blood signifies Christ’s blood, and He purchased His church with His own blood and through it the redemption is accomplished (Eph 1:7). Later, it was remembered during communion. Sometimes, it means hemorrhage (Mark 5:25, 29).

- And a woman who had had a hemorrhage for twelve years,... And immediately the flow of her blood was dried up; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her affliction (Mark 5:25, 29 NAS)

Remark 6: αἷμα in Mark 5:25, 29 means hemorrhage.

Final remark: The word literally means “blood of human being” or “blood of animal.” Sometimes it refers as hemorrhage. Figuratively, it has many meanings. It could mean murder; when it is used with “flesh,” it implies human beings. In Exodus, blood often means the blood of an unblemished lamb that typifies the blood of the Lamb of God, Christ (12:7, 22; 29:20-21; 30:10); sometimes it means the blood of animal sacrifices (Lev 4:5-7; 4:24-34; 8:15-30; 14:14-28; 16:14-19). The sacrificial blood could only be used for ritual services as blood of the sin offering (Ezek 45:19). Typologically, the blood of sacrificial animal in the Old Testament points to Christ’s blood as the fulfilment of His redemptive work (Heb 11:28).

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VITA

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In 2004, Toon earned his Doctor of Ministry from Reformed Theological Seminary (Jackson), and he continued his ministry as the senior minister of Grace Christian Church until his departure for East Asian mission in 2009. Currently, Toon serves as a missionary-teacher in East Asia, mainly in Taiwan and China, and he teaches at China Reformed Theological Seminary (Taipei, Taiwan) and trains Christian leaders in China.

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